The future of electronic entertainment issue#90

EDGE®

Shigeru Miyamoto spells out Nintendo's future at SpaceWorld

Sega's new tech wave Planet Harriers and NASCAR Arcade

Reviewed: every new PlayStation2 game that matters

PlayStation | PS2 | N64 | Dreamcast | PC | XBox | GameCube

Nintendo's resurrection

The world's greatest videogame company is back from the dead

2000BC

The debut of a new piece of hardware bearing Nintendo branding should, naturally, be cause for no small amount of celebration. But the GameCube announcement, made at Spaceworld 2000, was unlike the company's last major console unveiling in 1995 in that a company such as Silicon Graphics was not wheeled out in order to lend technological credibility to its new generation of hardware.

Despite Nintendo's seemingly constant crowing of its partnership with IBM in creating GameCube's 'Gekko' CPU, in Tokyo such hardware-focused triflings were consciously put to one side. Cynics would suggest that this was merely down to the company having produced a 128bit console relatively indistinguishable to PlayStation2 in terms of performance. Optimists, meanwhile, would point to the fact that, now that videogame technology has levelled out to the point where creatives can focus upon content, and not merely the strain of getting the polygons up there to represent it, Nintendo is no longer interested in a battle to deliver the most potent image-generation kit on the market, and has never been more focused in terms of delivering content that fulfils – or, more importantly, changes – the expectations of today's ever-more-cynical videogamers.

As Shigeru Miyamoto suggests in this month's interview (p76), the latter more accurately represents his company's thinking. GameCube does not offer DVD movie playback simply because Nintendo did not set out to provide anything more than a box which could play host to some of the most inventive and ultimately memorable gaming experiences.

This month **Edge** delivers a full report from Spaceworld 2000 (p68), where Nintendo mapped out its strategies in the form of a new home console and also a handheld device, Game Boy Advance, which will be building on an installed user base of over 100 million. This new unit, in particular, demonstrates that Nintendo is now not attempting to break technological ground simply for the sake of it. Rather, it is giving game developers an environment in which 3D camera systems and mipmapping considerations do not even present themselves. By engineering a form of technology such as Game Boy Advance, Nintendo is spelling out its future with one often-neglected word: gameplay.

Features

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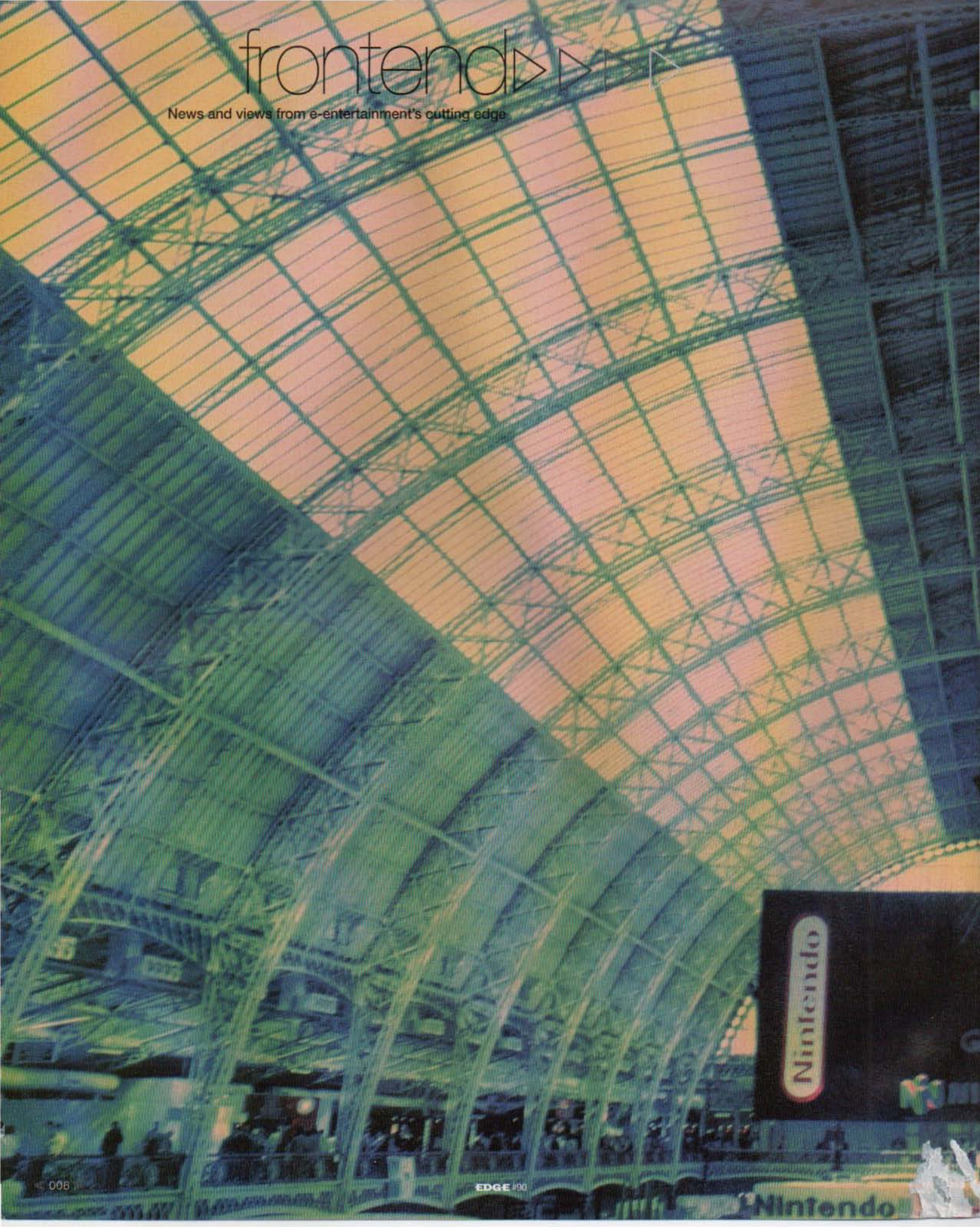


ECTS 2000 delivers mixed bag

Europe's premier videogame show fails to excite, with big names opting out, little new product on display, and few announcements

Photography: Martin Thompson

ECTS 2000, which took place from September 3-5 at London's Olympia exhibition centre, was a largely underwhelming affair, reflecting the difficult market conditions of an industry in transition. From next year the annual trade show will relocate to the purpose-built – and air-conditioned – exhibition centre ExCel, in London's Docklands, but a number of high-profile non-attendees and a general lack of new products and announcements marred this year's event. On the positive side Sony and Nintendo each had a significant presence, with Microsoft also talking behind closed doors, and there was a heightened interest in less conventional areas of videogaming, particularly the opportunities wireless gaming presents.

The biggest setback for the organiser was undoubtedly that several major publishers decided not to attend in favour of arranging their own engagements. Building on the success of previous years, Activision held its Activate showcase for press and retailers shortly before ECTS. EA's meeting, aimed at journalists, seemed last-minute in comparison, but still deprived ECTS of its substantial presence. And while several titles published by Eidos were on display at Olympia, including *TimeSplitters* on the Sony stand, and *Startopia*, courtesy of nVidia, the vast majority of the company's titles were demonstrated at a special conference in the week leading up to ECTS. Among the highlights of the Eidos roster was the stunning *Herdy Gerdy* from Core Design, and one or two meagre details regarding the future incarnation of Lara Croft, who Core seeks to develop in a more mature, character-driven direction.

The benefits of such an approach are clear. Publishers gain the undivided attention of their audience without the often substantial cost of maintaining a similar presence at the main event. It will be interesting to see, though, whether these companies return to the fold next year, after the industry will have been transformed by a maturing next-generation market.

Sega shuns show

It also remains to be determined whether Sega Europe will be in attendance next year, having also shunned the main show this year, retaining a presence only through the Gem Distribution stand. Instead, the company hired out the Empire Cinema on Leicester

The Sony stand showed off a selection of upcoming software running on the company's revamped 32bit console, but the real action was in the section devoted to PlayStation2, which was constantly full of attendees anxious to get their hands on playable demos

Square to show video footage of forthcoming titles, including *Daytona USA*. While this event was not restricted to members of the press, it is questionable whether showing 800 members of the public a rolling demo has a marketing impact that is comparable to the proper demonstration of titles such as *Jet Grind Radio*, *Metropolis Street Racer*, and an English-language version of *Shenmue*, to journalists and retailers. Certainly each of these titles had attendees drooling in anticipation over at ECTS.

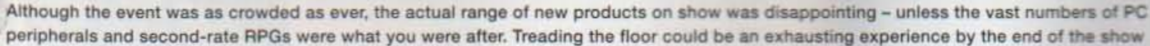
Sony and Nintendo go large

By contrast, the floor space taken up by Sony and Nintendo was substantial, showing that – although there was little on display that hadn't been seen before – both companies continue to take ECTS seriously as a marketing opportunity. Nintendo's Game Boy Advance, for example, was shown for the first time outside of Japan, with titles like *Mario Kart Advance* and *Konami All Star Racing*, which held a captive audience over the three days. Though incomplete, these titles were some of the most impressive at the show. GBA aside, the Nintendo stand had a predictable *Pokémon* bias, and apart from demonstrating that there is still life in the N64 in the shape of *Zelda: Majora's Mask* and *Conker's Bad Fur Day* among others, afforded the eagle eyed the opportunity to spot Shigeru Miyamoto on his second visit to ECTS.

The floor space taken up by Sony and Nintendo was substantial, showing that both companies continue to take ECTS seriously

Meanwhile, although the punters who packed the company's stand weren't complaining, Sony's record was somewhat blemished by games like *Chase The Express*, albeit running on the redesigned PSone. Nevertheless, a raft of playable demos running on PlayStation2 redeemed this poor showing, not least an impressive-looking *Gran Turismo 2000*, and *Supersky Odyssey*. Technology demos afforded attendees the opportunity to look suitably embarrassed about waving a bright-green appendage for the latter.

For obvious reasons, Microsoft didn't have quite such a tangible presence, but representatives were present at the show, ready to confirm that the X-Box design has been finalised, and that the controllers will follow the Sony paradigm, rather than Nintendo's attempt to redefine this with the GameCube controller. Significantly, Microsoft chose ECTS to publicise a long list of thirdparty developers that have signed up for X-Box, with Ed Fries revealing an interesting line-up which includes Lionhead



Although the event was as crowded as ever, the actual range of new products on show was disappointing – unless the vast numbers of PC peripherals and second-rate RPGs were what you were after. Treading the floor could be an exhausting experience by the end of the show

Nintendo's Game Boy Advance stole the show this year, but observant attendees may also have been able to spot Shigeru Miyamoto, who was promoting products behind closed doors. There were also a number of strong N64 titles on display

Satellites, Universal Interactive Studios, Stormfront Studios, Digital Illusions, and the Climax Group.

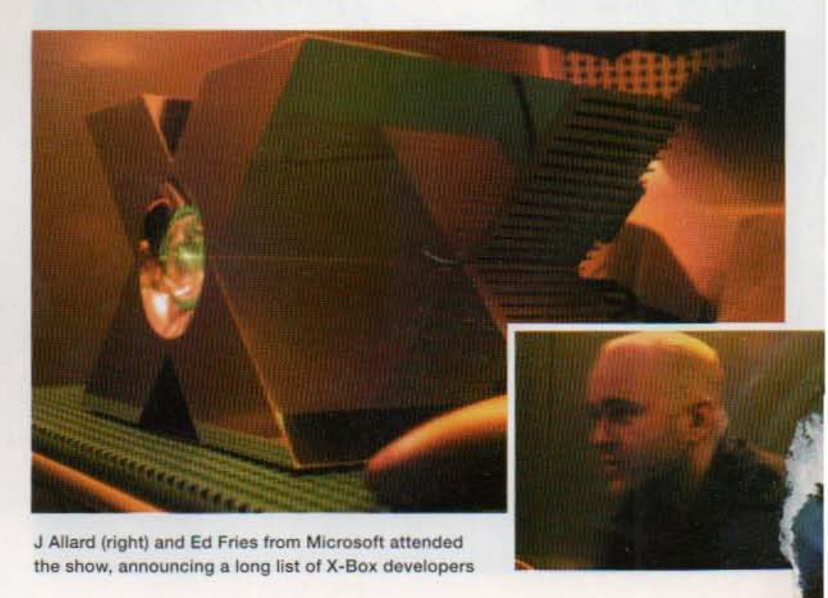
Wireless presence

In addition to these stalwarts of previous years, an almost inordinate amount of space was taken up by companies propounding the potential of wireless gaming. Although still in its infancy, this issue generated a huge amount of hype. Many of the companies mentioned in last month's **Edge** feature on the subject were in attendance, in an attempt to increase awareness of the platform. Motorola's stand was notable for the GPRS handsets that were on display, particularly the model that was running a platform game that seemed pitched somewhere between the GBC and GBA in terms of technology. Market analysis company Datamonitor also announced the results of its 'Wireless Gaming' report, authored by Frederic Diot, suggesting that the market for such games will be worth $6bn by 2005. If the well-meaning but ill-informed questions put to Diot by a correspondent from a national newspaper are indicative of the general level of understanding, such a report is timely indeed, and the companies expounding the virtues of wireless games have their work cut out for them.

Aside from these more prominent trends, there was plenty to keep showgoers occupied, even if there weren't too many heart-stopping moments. Konami, which had one of the busiest stalls at the show, added a couple of minutes to its *Metal Gear Solid* video demonstration and had several playable demos, including the intriguing *Red*, *Gradius III* and *IV*, and *Seven Blades*. Meanwhile Capcom worked behind closed doors to increase its European presence. Intel discussed its GHz Pentium processor and the major graphics cards manufacturers were also showing off their wares. For the first time at ECTS, there was also an area specifically set aside for developers, though

The highlight for freeloaders was the Sony party, which must have put the minds to rest of anybody worried about the future of the industry

…ni booth (to the bottom right of photo, above) drew steady crowds looking out …y extra minutes of *MGS* footage, but there was no rapturous applause à la E3



J Allard (right) and Ed Fries from Microsoft attended the show, announcing a long list of X-Box developers

From next year ECTS will move to a purpose-built exhibition centre in Docklands, hopefully reflecting an upswing in the industry's fortune

Games of the show

There was a wide array of awards on offer at ECTS, particularly the Game Of The Show awards, voted for by a panel of 15 European journalists, including **Edge**'s own sagacious representative. Surprisingly, *Mario Kart Advance* cleaned up, despite being only partly complete. The winners were:

Overall Best Game of the Show:
Mario Kart Advance (Nintendo)
Best PC Game of the Show:
Sacrifice (Interplay)
Best PlayStation Game of the Show:
GT2000 (Sony)
Best Nintendo Game of the Show:
Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask (Nintendo)
Best Dreamcast Game of the Show:
Jet Grind Radio (Sega)
Best Handheld Game of the Show:
Mario Kart Advance (Nintendo)
Best Multiplayer Game of the Show:
Mario Kart Advance (Nintendo)

The ECTS awards were voted for by visitors to the ECTS Web site, the results as follows:
Best Console of the Year:
PlayStation2
Best PC of the Year:
Voodoo 5 5500 from 3dfx
Best Console Game of the Year:
Perfect Dark from Nintendo
Best PC Game of the Year:
Diablo II from Havas Interactive
Publisher of the Year:
Havas Interactive.

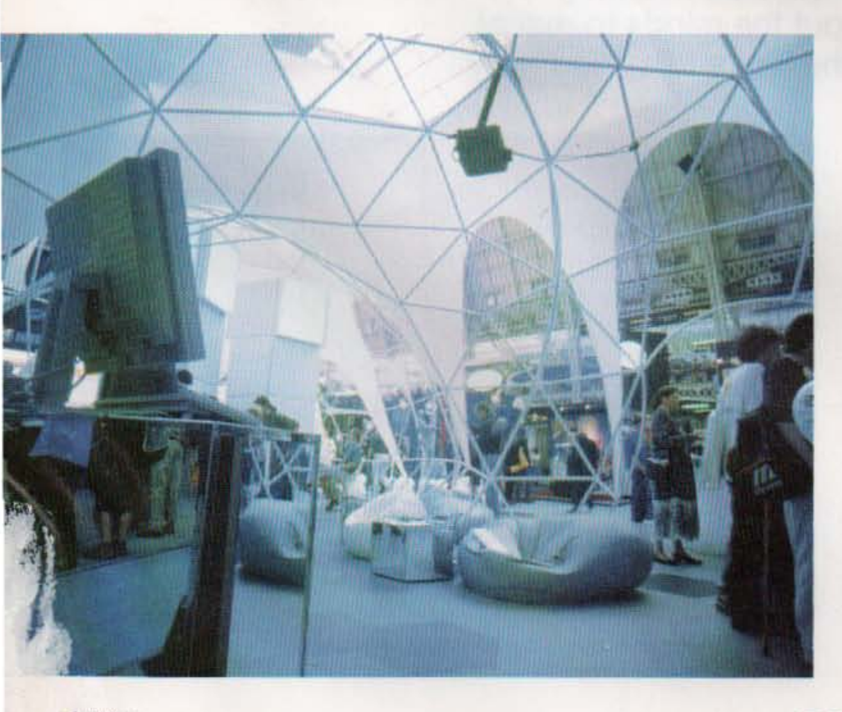
There were two further awards:
CTW Award for Marketing:
Pokémon from Nintendo
MCV Best of British Award:
Codemasters

as journalists weren't allowed into the developer lounge, there was little to report – apart from noting that free beverages were available to developers who frequented the lounge from 4-6pm on the Monday of ECTS. Coincidentally, this was the same time that **Edge Live** was taking place a little distance from Olympia. ELSPA and Screen Digest tried their hardest to bring cheer to all of the long faces with their third annual report into the European leisure software market. While acknowledging the transitional period faced by the console sector, the report forecasts record-breaking sales of consoles in 2002 and 2003 and an expanded software market.

The great ECTS sideshow

Indeed, as with previous years, there was plenty for attendees to be amused by. Superior Technology's range of peripherals, for example, which included the 'Mumbo Jumbo' control for use with maraca-style games (ie *Samba de Amigo*). Or Gianluca Vialli turning up to sign autographs at the Midas Interactive stand to promote *Gianluca Vialli's Premiership Manager*. But the highlight for freeloaders was undoubtedly the Sony Party, which must also have put the minds to rest of anybody in any doubt about the future of the industry. The sheer folly of decking out an immense warehouse-style location with table football, fairground rides and, of course, PlayStation2 units, and featuring a performance by Jamiroquai and Ronnie Wood, is a sure sign that if any company has the wherewithal to silence its critics and invigorate the market, it is Sony.

So, while the overwhelming sentiment of attendees was one of resignation in the face of a meagre amount of new product information, there are encouraging signs that next year's ECTS will be an altogether more upbeat affair. Current developments in the sphere of wireless gaming, coupled with the eventual release of X-Box and the maturation of PlayStation2 product, promise to put a smile back on the faces of even the most cynical players.



Several major publishers decided to forego the expense of having a lavish booth at holding their own events for press and retail. Nevertheless, there were still some fi examples of temporary architecture in an attempt to capture the attention of ... s

industryopinion

Edge gauges how companies view ECTS

"Ever since all the major UK retailers and specialist press editors decided to fully support E3, the role of ECTS in the buying calendar has been significantly diluted. Buyers and journalists now see the product at E3 in May, with follow-up presentations to retail, and studio trips, etc, for journalists in June/July. The indies are being reached by Aspen and Pinnacle, who also benefit from exposure to our key accounts presentations. By the time you get to September we are well down the sell-in and PR processes, and ECTS essentially becomes a reminder exercise. Throw in the cost of stand, design and construction and you have a fairly compelling case not to exhibit, particularly in a transition year. It }remains important for smaller territories on the continent, however, who may not be able to participate in the buying calendar as outlined above."
Al King, UK marketing director, EA

"Lets face it, during ECTS, year in, year out we see the same faces, in the same bars saying the same things: "Isn't the show bollox this year," and "Has anybody got any spare tickets for the Sony party?" Publishers don't want to waste valuable profit margins, when the people they want to attract are usually propping up a bar outside the Olympia complex. It's no coincidence that some companies have taken to renting the upstairs rooms of the surrounding hostelries to attract business. Unless we revert to having trade and public days, I believe the event will not survive at this scale. The problem now for 'up and coming' development teams is that many publishers are not represented at ECTS, making it difficult to make that initial contact. E3 seems to have the right balance of trade and public obligations."
Gary Carr, director, Mucky Foot

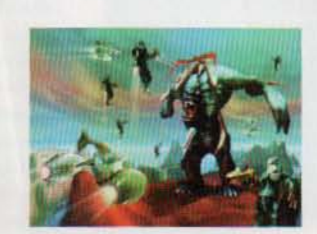
"The fact that ECTS is Bastion's busiest time clearly proves that the majority of the industry still views the event as the most important in Europe. I do, however, think it lacked the buzz of previous years – though that's a result of the industry's transition, not of the show itself. Had Konami not unveiled *MGS2* at this year's E3, it would have been a terrible bore – but those nine minutes saved the three days, proving enough to distract every attendee from the copious amounts of rubbish on display elsewhere. Sure there were highlights, but generally the standard of software at both trade shows this year has been low – hence the events themselves being knocked. When a handheld sweeps the majority of accolades – as GBA did at ECTS this year – that's a pretty clear indication that nothing much is doing on the home consoles. However, the fact that Nintendo chose the show to premier their next major hardware launch outside of Japan demonstrates it views the show as massively important. Next year things will be different. Microsoft will be showing off its X-Box titles openly, and the PS2 games should have improved upon the first-generation dross. The industry as a whole will be on the upturn, and we'll all be dead excited again. As for the lack of Sega, Electronic Arts, Eidos, et al – well, that's fair enough and if they feel they can do business in other ways, then we should happily leave them to it. But doesn't the fact that the so-called big-name companies which didn't exhibit felt the need to hijack the show in the form of after-hours parties or events indicate that while they're happy to sit out ECTS, they sure as hell can't afford to ignore it? One of the notable absentees traipsed 110 of its staff to the show – so it clearly thought it a worthwhile show, despite not feeling confident enough to show its own games there.

Finally, ECTS is a fantastic face for the industry. I was speaking to a guy from a national newspaper who was attending for the first time and he said he was surprised at how 'human' the attendees looked – he was expecting a hall full of long-haired, pasty Goths. That's how the real world still views us, so it's important to remind them that we're not a bunch of geeky kids. Again, this is demonstrated by the diversity of exhibitors – in years to come people will look back and laugh at how surprised we were when Motorola tipped-up and started unpacking their stand. Especially when it is a fully fledged publisher itself."
Simon Byron, director, Bastion

"ECTS is essential to the formation and development of industry relationships. With the continual emergence of various media, it is important to have an event in Europe such as this in order to introduce all sides of the gaming world."
Colin Grant, marketing manager, Capcom Eurosoft

"From our point of view, ECTS was a wonderful opportunity for Nintendo to show Game Boy Advance, in terms of timing to the market. It also provided a great opportunity before Christmas to show several titles for Nintendo 64 and Game Boy Colour, including *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver*, all of which were playable by retail, trade, and press. I think it might be better when it relocates next year, but the principal of having a show in September after E3 in May is a good one, especially for companies with products to show".
Dick Francis, managing director, THE Games

Edge's picks of ECTS



te a generally poor software showing at this year's ECTS, there were still titles that caught the eye. Apart from several titles on the GBA, **Edge**'s favourites were as follows (clockwise o left): *Summoner*, *SSX*, *No One Lives Forever*, *Oni*, *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, *The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask*, *Black & White*, *Shenmue*, *Giants*, and *Metropolis Street Racer*

Phil Harrison VP of thirdparty relations and R&D, SCEA

Pete Molyneux managing director, Lionhead

Gary Liddon managing director, Climax Fareham

J Allard general manager, X-Box platform and thirdparty, Microsoft

David Perry chief executive officer, Shiny Entertainment

Steve Cooke director of online, HotGen Studios

Edge Live: it's good to talk

Developer conference is well attended, and touches on issues of the massmarket, online gaming and the state of the industry

After the main panel discussion there were some lively questions from the audience, which included luminaries such as Jez San from Argonaut and Jon Hare of Codemasters

The only place that people were able to see **Phil Harrison** of Sony and **J Allard** of Microsoft take part in a debate over the three days of ECTS was at the inaugural **Edge Live** event, which took place at the Olympia Hotel in London on Monday, September 6. The event provided a forum fr developers to benefit from the insights of a panel of industry veterans, exchange and discuss ideas in an informal environment, is planned to become a regular annual eve

The event started with an introductio by **Laurine Garaude**, a director from co- organiser Milia, who stressed the need fo such events, and pointed to the compan own think tank forums, adding: "We have longstanding commitment to creative tale and to the development community. Clear is developers who hold the key to the futur

Photography: Martin Thompson

The afternoon opened with an introduction from Milia, which will be holding its own event for developers in Cannes next year. There followed a presentation from Forrester Research regarding online usage, before attendees were treated to the ruminations and cogitations of a select panel of industry veterans. Perhaps the highlight of the event was the opportunity to witness both Sony and Microsoft at the same table

interactive entertainment – games and beyond." Milia 2001 is set to take place in Cannes in February next year. After this p eface, Dr Therese Torres, of Forrester esearch, gave a brief report into the nificance of online usage for the eogame industry.

panellists

anel-led discussion was chaired by Cooke, of HotGen Studios, and in n to the representatives from two of ajor console players, consisted of sentatives from independent developers Edge editor Tony Mott. Gary Liddon from ax, and Peter Molyneux, of Lionhead ios, were joined by **Dave Perry**, who just received the PC game of the show rd at ECTS, for *Sacrifice* (and, just as importantly, had just got engaged).

Edge had prepared a long list of topics for consideration by the panel, although, in the event, there was time to cover only a fraction, owing to the lively debate and questions from the audience that ensued (the latter enlivened by Cooke's exhortation that questions from the floor be announced by jumping up and down on a chair).

Attracting the massmarket

The first topic for contemplation was the question of attracting the massmarket to online gaming, and provided Allard and Harrison the opportunity to confound the expectations of attendees by agreeing about something. Given that current online gaming is characterised in titles like *Ultima Online* and *Everquest* by a subject matter and interface that is obscure to the uninitiated, what sort of environments need to be forged in order to take online gaming to the masses in a next-generation console environment? Allard argued that first-mover advantage would be sufficient encouragement for developers to move into the online arena to produce a

Among the topics raised from the floor were wireless gaming, sexism in videogames, and the question of rising development costs

Although J Allard isn't showing the strain, Peter Molyneux looked slightly out of sorts after a late night drinking rather a lot of absinthe with the Microsoft crew

wider range of gaming experiences: "I don't have a crystal ball. It's hard to predict where creativity and genius will strike, but our strategy is to lay the foundation. We can make it simple, we can make the infrastructure work, but at the end of the day there has to be a compelling value proposition. The potential is enormous, but the startup costs are very high."

It was then that Harrison added: "I was just going to agree with Microsoft on that point, I think J's absolutely right. One thing that has been proven is that there is unbelievable consumer loyalty to these products, so the first movers – and this is almost an encouragement to developers here today – need to be brave. It's going to be expensive, but it's going to be a land grab." He went on to describe the 'Harry Potter' series, rather controversially, as the perfect online product. In response to Allard's assertion that everybody would want to play as Potter himself, Cooke conducted a quick survey which revealed that of the assembled developers and press, only **Jez San** from Argonaut would like to be Harry Potter.

Time shortage

On that note the discussion moved on to the next subject, which was whether gamers will find sufficient time in future to play videogames, and whether games in general need to be made less complex. "I think we should have large games, but we should allow players to get into them quite quickly, and allow them to dig as deeply as they want to go," argued Perry, before a question from Jon Hare of Codemasters, in the audience, raised the issue of rising development costs. Allard provided an optimistic response, though: "I think that the online component of gaming will change the medium in such a fundamental way that it will allow people to enter the market."

The panel then considered the matter of realism in videogames, and the difficulties of impressing upon the massmarket the differences between the next cycle of consoles and their predecessors. As San put it from the floor: "We have to face the fact that consumers noticed when we switched from 2D to 3D. That was a huge paradigm shift. We need to figure out what the next paradigm shift is, and they will notice that." The panel was divided as to whether 'reality is a fad', or whether it offers the best gaming hook for the massmarket.

Open discussion

Towards the end of the event, the debate was thrown open to the floor. Among the topics raised were wireless gaming, sexism in videogames, and again the question of rising development costs. In response, Perry called for a greater professionalism from the industry: "I think one of the big problems is that videogame developers can't handle big games. They're not organised enough."

Finally, after wrapping up, free drinks for all allowed attendees and panellists to further exchange ideas, with many taking up the opportunity, despite the rush for tickets to the Sony party later that evening. Overall reaction to **Edge Live** was positive, and the event was well attended, which bodes well. Indeed, in order to identify the next paradigm in videogaming, readers need look no further. Remember that you first heard of Allard's suggestion for a new game here: *Drink Drink Revolution*.

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What did attendees make of Edge Live?

"I think there should be more events like [Edge Live] as it's something we don't seem to do as much as the US guys do. We need to stand up and promote the UK industry a lot more. Plus I think we all need to do a lot more to attract new talent into the industry. It's always interesting to hear the thoughts of others who make games for a living. I see Peter Molyneux in a different light since I heard him speak about how much he loved the work of Yu Suzuki at GDC. And I'll turn up to anything that Phil Harrison is speaking at. Sony has a lot to talk about right now, and you just can't ignore them. It was great to see Gary Liddon up there, as Climax is one of the largest developers in the country, but who else can we add? Or is it always going to be Phil Harrison, Molyneux, and Dave Perry? Perhaps a more carefully selected audience would improve the event. Most of it seemed to be rival press this year. There were only three questions asked by developers (me from Criterion, a guy from Sony Camden, and the great Jon Hare from Codies – get him up there next year). More time is needed, fewer long-winded questions, more developers, more questions from the floor, less overseas press from Web sites no one's heard of and no jumping up and down on seats to ask a question!"
Alex Ward, creative manager, Criterion

"I really enjoyed it. One thing you have to realise is that when a panel of industry veterans comes together, two things happen: 1. You get to benefit from their hindsight as they often have 15 to 20 years of experience each, and so the current 'turmoil' of the industry is a lot less daunting to them. This results in clear advice based on sound past knowledge. 2. You get to benefit from their foresight as some of the panel members work for hardware companies, they know things that the public and even developers are not yet aware of. They will always keep their cards to their chests for legal reasons, but in their answers, if you read between the lines, you can gain good insight into the future we can expect. (That's why representatives from Sony, Nintendo, Microsoft, Sega are welcome.) To be honest, when I am on a panel, I also feel like a member of the audience; I love to hear what is in the minds of these important people. I love to hear what they are mentally juggling with, and until we have mind probes, going to panels is the most efficient way to get a diverse discussion going from key people around the world."
Dave Perry, CEO, Shiny Entertainment

"After spending seven years programming the Develop! conference, I'm obviously in favour of developer-driven events in Europe, and in the UK in particular. Exactly what form those events take, however, is not an easy question. GDC is an obvious success, but the American climate is very different and people get less holiday there, so are more open (and more often encouraged) to get out of the office. Here everything's a bit more insular and people tend to play their cards closer to their chests, which will always be a challenge for anyone trying to get developers together to talk."
Steve Cooke, director of online, HotGen Studios

WonderSwan Color hatches

Bandai announces technical specifications of its GBA competitor

A strong software selection for WonderSwan Color will commence with Square's *Final Fantasy* series, and continue with titles from a sound thirdparty line up. Nevertheless, it remains to be determined whether this will be enough to see off the challenge of Game Boy Advance

Bandai has announced details of its oft-postponed colour handheld device, WonderSwan Color, just a few days after Nintendo's Spaceworld 2000.

The general specifications of the device are largely the same as its black-and-white predecessor, though there are a few changes. The size remains unchanged, as does the power source, consisting of two AA batteries. The biggest difference is its screen – the DSTN colour display is 2.49x2.8 inches, with a resolution of 224x144. Capable of displaying up to 241 colours simultaneously from a palette of 4,096, and with 512Kb of RAM, the maximum cartridge capacity is 512Kb. Nevertheless, one of the biggest problems with the original WonderSwan was that its screen was fairly reflective, making it difficult to play. It would appear that this has not been fixed, and the DSTN screen less advanced than TFT screen of GBA.

While the WonderSwan Color will be priced at ¥6,800 (£45), games are set to cost between ¥3,000 (£20) and ¥5,000.(£33) Backward compatibility will ensure that games purchased for the original WonderSwan will be playable.

Having been developed in cooperation with Square, the platform is set for a strong software line-up from launch. The developer will bring a succession of its most famous NES titles to WonderSwan Color, starting with the first *Final Fantasy*, which is set for release in the winter and followed by the second and third titles in the series. Other planned titles include *Romancing Saga* and *Hataraku Chocobo*. The roster of thirdparty developers known to be working for the platform is equally strong, with SCEI, Toy, HAL and Namco all lined up.

There are a host of peripherals planned for the device. The WonderGate adapter will enable it to be connected to mobile phones, and there are also extensions that add compatability to MemoryStick and SD cards. There is also a USB port, and a demo has showed the WonderSwan Color linked to a PC laptop and a PS2.

Bandai's greatest problem will be competing with Game Boy Advance. Even a strong software line-up couldn't help the original

Bandai's greatest problem will be competing with Game Boy Advance. A strong software line up did not enable the original WonderSwan to seriously compete with Game Boy Color, and Nintendo's strategy for the handheld market seems to be much more robust than that of Bandai. Although the device will undoubtedly find a market in Japan, it remains to be seen whether this will be sufficiently large, and whether the *Final Fantasy* franchise will give the machine any chance of asserting itself in the west.

WonderSwan Color was demonstrated running connected to a laptop and PS2, but it is not clear how this feature will work in practice. It remains an exciting development, though

Ferrari dream crashes

Job losses of 160 as Acclaim leaves the development road, cancelling all games based on the Italian motor manufacturer

The closure of Acclaim's Croydon-based studio was compounded recently by the cancellation of titles based on the Ferrari licence. At the time, Acclaim denied that the fortunes of the studio, formerly known as Probe, were caused by changing circumstances of the parent company, arguing instead that it was simply an act of consolidation that would position it for the transitional market that the industry now faces.

However, the recent Ferrari cancellations point to a different picture, which the company spelled out in this statement: "Due to a decline in revenues brought about by the transition in the market, Acclaim has re-evaluated the investment requirement for Ferrari and made the decision to suspend development of all titles under the Ferrari licence."

Edge spoke to a disgruntled former employee who argues that the problem is greater than Acclaim is willing to admit: "At this point in time Acclaim has a serious cashflow problem due to lack of product sales, on all platforms, globally," he argues, adding that this is due to a failure to anticipate trends in the market. In all, around 160 people have been made redundant, and apart from the Ferrari titles, between six and eight other games cancelled. **Edge**'s source, who asked not to be named, also questioned the exact nature of Acclaim's agreement with Ferrari: "I understand that Acclaim never officially had the Ferrari licence anyway, which is why we never got any help from Ferrari during the development process."

Staff resentment

It remains to be seen what will happen to the thirdparty Ferrari development, namely Brain in a Jar's *Ferrari 360 Challenge*, but the manner in which Acclaim treated its internal development staff has caused some resentment. "In the weeks leading up to the studio being shut down – even up to the hours before we had to leave the building – we were being told that our new studio at Mortlake was almost finished and that we would all be moving up there shortly," claims **Edge**'s source. "There is no way that Acclaim didn't know the studio was to be closed months before this happened. It's not something that's decided one morning and then carried out the next day. We were led to believe that our jobs were safe and that we all had loads of work to do on about six titles that were in development." Despite repeated requests, Acclaim was unavailable for comment regarding the situation.

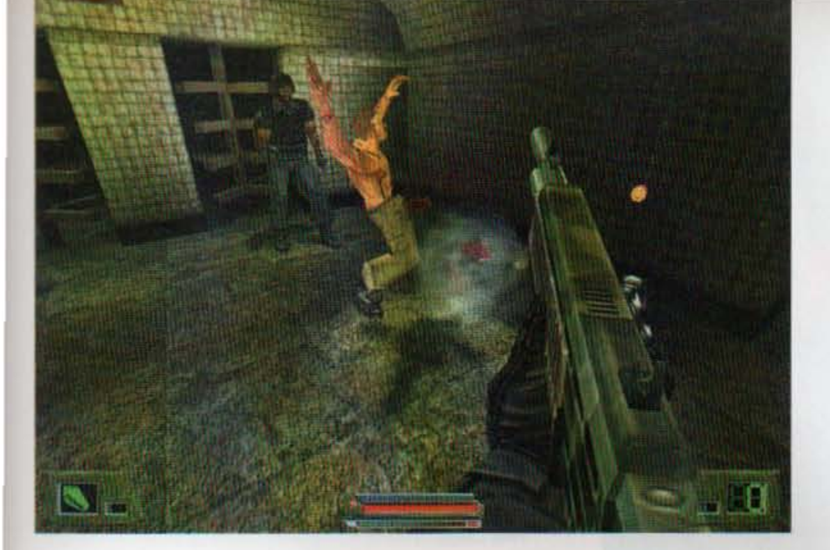
While any news that a development house has had to shut down is bad news, this episode demonstrates more than just the serious effects of difficult market conditions. It also lends strength to Dave Perry's exhortations at **Edge Live** that the industry as a whole needs to grow up and adopt a more professional attitude. Issues like the shoddy treatment of employees lines up alongside questions of sexism in the industry as a good indication of an immaturity that shows few signs of abating.

It is unclear whether Brain in a Jar's *Ferrari 360 Challenge* (above) will be picked up by an alternative publisher, but it is definitely the end for Acclaim's Ferrari-themed F1 game (left)

Tekken Tag Tournament tweaked

Namco implements full-scene antialiasing for western market

In addition to the one-on-one mode that has been added to the western release of *Tekken Tag Tournament*, it has emerged that Namco has also optimised the code in order to implement full-scene antialiasing, resulting in significantly more impressive visuals. It is not yet known whether or not further PS2 titles will receive similar treatment.



Titles like *Soldier Of Fortune* (above) and *Doom* (right) continue to be a cause of concern, prompting the recent FTC report

Sega CEO testifies

United States Senate Commerce Committee holds hearing looking into violence in videogames

Peter Moore, president and CEO of Sega of America, testified before the United States Senate Commerce Committee last month, in response to a Federal Trade Commission (FTC) report which claimed that the US entertainment industry consistently markets violent content to unsuitable audiences.

The report, entitled 'Children, Violence, and the Media' recommended a two-pronged assault on media violence: "Encouraging corporate responsibility and empowering parents."

Moore's voluntary testimony disputed the conclusions of the report and pointed to the efforts that the industry has already taken to ensure effective self regulation: "It is neither practical nor fair to imply that we should bypass advertising media targeted to the gaming enthusiast simply because of the possibility of spillage to a younger demographic. Having said that, I also want you to know that we are thoughtful and sensitive to the fact that children may be unintentionally receiving messages meant for an older audience. In recognition of such a situation, Sega and the IDSA both enjoy close relations with our retail partners and continually work with them to develop new programs to educate consumers about the age and content suitability of videogames."

Although the report was not aimed solely at the videogames, and did not examine the causal relationship between violence and the media, the issue has been seized upon by the presidential campaigners Al Gore and George W Bush, ensuring that this one looks set to run and run.

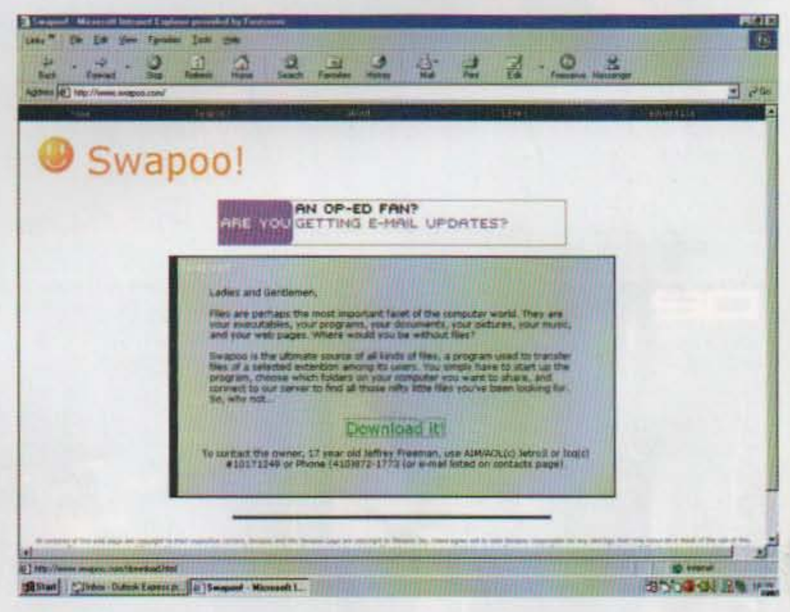
Gaming's Napster threat

Teenaged American gamer Jeffrey Freeman launches Swapoo, a program that facilitates the exchange of electronic entertainment

The Napster case acquired a special resonance for the software industry recently with the launch of Swapoo, a file-sharing utility ostensibly targeted at those who wish to trade ROM dumps for cartridge-based videogames. Although other utilities offering peer-to-peer transfers (such as Gnutella, Scour, and the emergent Freenet) also allow the transfer of ROMs, Swapoo's debut – as a program designated as a means of exchanging electronic entertainment – marks the beginning of a turbulent transitional period for software houses.

With the Napster case having made peer-to-peer transfers a newsworthy item, Swapoo gained a degree of instant notoriety at launch. Featured on the US CNBC TV news and on the cover of *USA Today*, its 17-year-old founder Jeffrey Freeman has been quick to refute claims that it is a tool for piracy. Promising that 'illegal' downloads will be blocked, and perpetrators banned from using the service, Freeman is apparently surprised by the media coverage – he claims that the utility's modest 50.5K executable was designed primarily for his own use, and as something to enhance his CV. The prominent inclusion of his identity and contact details upon the site, however, suggest a certain degree of opportunistic guile; Napster's similarly youthful creator is now, if not a household name, then certainly a more famous figure than he could have otherwise hoped to be.

While industry figures have been quick to condemn Swapoo, its existence is symptomatic of a much larger issue that software houses must face within coming years. With a 56K modem, peer-to-peer transfers are restricted to relatively small files. The growth in domestic use of broadband technologies, however, will make programs like Swapoo, Gnutella and – most significantly – the entirely 'anonymous' likes of Freenet hotbeds of pirate activity. This could lead to the one thing that the software industry fears most: piracy entering the mainstream, with latter-day Napsters offering access to newly launched titles. **Edge** will cover this controversial issue in a forthcoming in-depth feature.

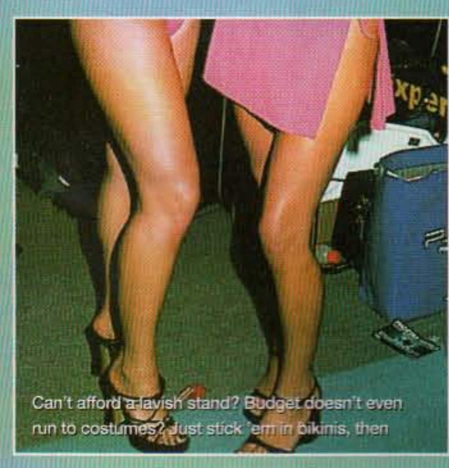


Whether it represents a genuine invitation to pirate videogames or is an absurdly canny publicity stunt, Swapoo poses questions the music industry is already struggling with

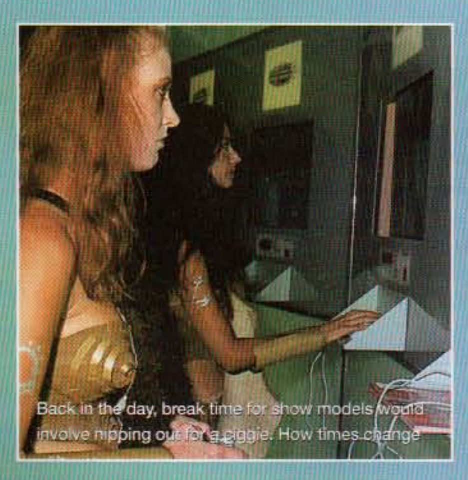
OUT THERE

REPORTAGE

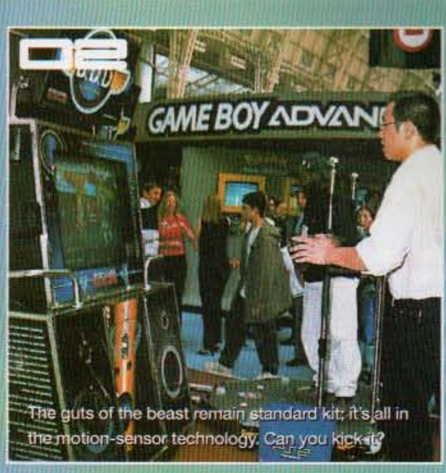
In the absence of Sega, Gem Distribution's stand offered up a trio of shock-mopped Ulala-alikes



Can't afford a lavish stand? Budget doesn't even run to costumes? Just stick 'em in bikinis, then



Back in the day, break time for show models would involve nipping out for a ciggie. How times change



The guts of the beast remain standard kit; it's all in the motion-sensor technology. Can you kick it?

Ben Hur 2000: the game that made ECTS go mental. Charlton Heston, eat your heart out

01 Game girls invade ECTS

UK: A disappointing ECTS still provided the occasional surreal diversion. The prize for most gratuitous use of female flesh was bagged with ease by Flare Media, whose *Erotica Island* attempts to further the *Leisure Suit Larry* theme. Queues for photographs with the bikini-clad lasses occasionally reached three deep. Other oddly memorable moments included the sights of Amazons sampling the delights of *Gran Turismo 2000*, and no fewer than three Ulalas. Unlike at E3, however, where attendees slobbered over similarly styled *Space Channel 5* babes, ECTS visitors remained resolutely English and simply gazed on, politely.

02 Coin-ops get physical

UK: It took two little-known Korean companies to pep up an otherwise lacklustre ECTS with their outlandish arcade designs. While many stands received but a cursory glance, Multimedia Content's *Ben Hur 2000* ensured the company some of the longest queues by giving gamers the opportunity to whip themselves into a frenzy. Game Infinity, meanwhile, afforded out-of-shape gamers with the chance to exercise with what was being termed *Tekken Aerobics*. The motion-sensor technology appeared to be reasonably responsive, although only the most shameless of attendees attempted anything approaching any of the game's more difficult combos.

Soundbytes

"The pictures don't look so much like cubes as they did before. The Fantavisions is odd. It is very slow and weird. It is like the old Atari games."

A ***Daily Mirror* reader** offers his opinion on PS2

"Superhero women – who decides just how big the boobies are?"

FHM questions Neversoft producer Kevin Mulhall

"Console games have been more like comic books, and PC games have been more like 'The Illiad'. If you don't read the whole thing you're not going to get it"

J Allard looking to the future of X-Box by referring to the musings of a blind man

"What about *Super Metroid*, eh? I'll be whacking off over that one tonight!"

US Web journo after seeing the GameCube demo at Spaceworld

"I see myself as a caring friend of her. I've been writing many times that if she would need any help whatsoever, it doesn't matter what, then she could ask me. You could say a companion in times of need"

Superfan **Niels Bernsden** on his 'special' relationship with Lara Croft

"Yes, wireframe graphics – as in *Asteroids*, as in *Defender*"

***The Guardian*'s Online** section on *Vib Ribbon*'s visuals. If anyone knows where a non-sprite version of *Defender* can be found, tell all

03 Pokémon battle ships

Australia: Though modern sport is packed to bursting with strangely proportioned freaks with special abilities, Nintendo intended to take things a stage further at this year's Olympics by introducing *Pokémon* to the mix. On September 12 bemused visitors stared aghast as the *Pokémon* Battleship cruised into Sydney Harbour to publicise the biggest *Pokémon* tournament ever. The championships ran from September 20-22, and were open to all nationalities. At the time of writing details of prizes were unconfirmed, although most Sydney competitors would no doubt be happy with the prospect of a *Pokémon* lunchbox and GB.

04 A mission for Lara

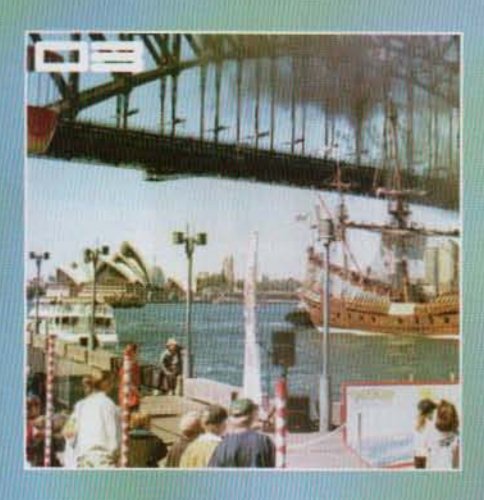
Holland: Is his utter devotion to a group of polygons the epitome of hardcore gaming, or is he just plain daft? Amsterdam's Niels Bernsden was happy being Lara Croft's number one fan, but the death of Lara in *The Last Revelation* prompted a cycling tour from his home city on September 3 to reach Core's offices in Derby on September 5. Obviously, the news that two more *Tomb Raider* games are in development rather negated the exercise, but Core was happy to accommodate his eccentricities and reassure him that Ms Croft will indeed return – so long as Christmas is never cancelled.

05 Games turn on TV

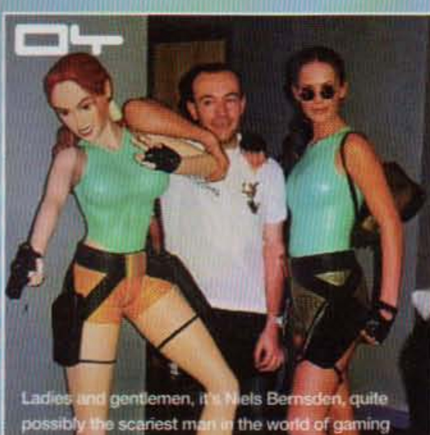
UK: A brief history of videogames entitled 'Thumb Candy' is to be broadcast on Channel 4 in October. The programme, produced by TalkBack, will feature notable videogame veterans including Nolan Bushnell, Tomohiro Nishikado (of *Space Invaders* fame), Sir Clive Sinclair, and Shigeru Miyamoto. The programme, presented by Iain Lee, will be an hour long and will chart the origins of the industry, its major influences on culture, and some of the dreams that turned to nightmares. Do you think Trip Hawkins'll feature?

Data Stream

Number of people who pre-registered for ECTS 2000: **25,500**
Number of pre-registers for ECTS 1999: **19,500**
Percentage of pre-registers which were from the press: **10%**
Percentage of non-UK attendees: **30%**
Companies with stands at ECTS 2000: **325**
Companies with stands at ECTS1999: **250**
Number of PS2 pre-orders taken over the phone in two hours by Dixons: **10,000**
Price of DVD player and Dreamcast bundle to be offered this Christmas by Sega's distributor, Gem: **£300**
Price of the Encore DVD player if bought separately: **£200**
Datamonitor's estimation of the number of mobile game users by 2005: **200m**
Top-selling game of all time according to the Japanese Video Game Association: ***Super Mario Bros.* (NES)**
Number of copies sold: **6.81m**
Top-selling PlayStation game of all time (ranked 10th): ***Final Fantasy VII***
Number of *FFVII* units sold: **3.6m**
Top-selling Sega game of all time (ranked 80th): ***Virtua Fighter***
Number of *VF* copies sold: **1.3m**
Number of games in top-selling chart which run on Nintendo hardware: **85**
Identity of substance most likely to clog up a computer keyboard according to AOL research: **Cornflakes**



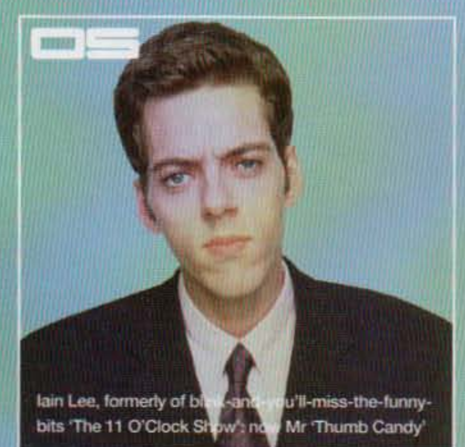
Banned substances at the *Pokémon* Olympics include Nandrolone, Ephedrine and Super Repel



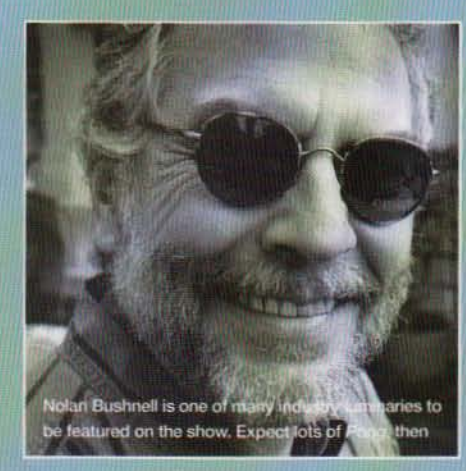
Ladies and gentlemen, it's Niels Bernsden, quite possibly the scariest man in the world of gaming

Bernsden has written hundreds of letters to Lara and sees her as a role model for a generation. He is 24

Real-life Lara Lucy Clarkson turned up to celebrate Bernsden's arrival. Refreshments? Lucozade, natch

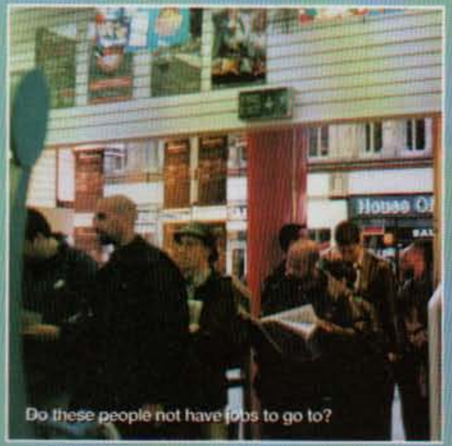


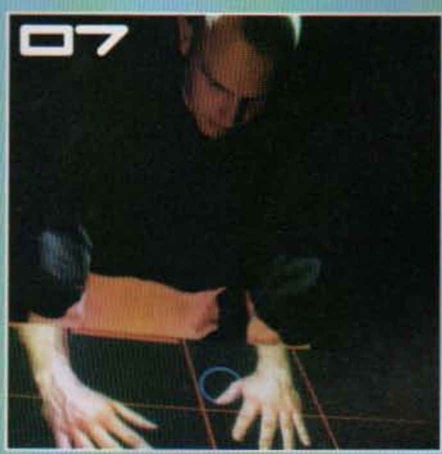
Iain Lee, formerly of blink-and-you'll-miss-the-funny-bits 'The 11 O'Clock Show': now Mr 'Thumb Candy'



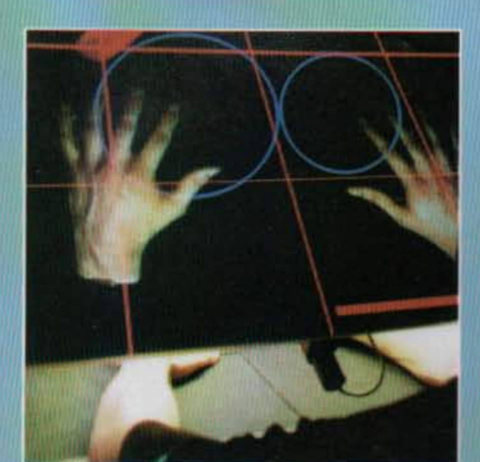
Nolan Bushnell is one of many industry luminaries to be featured on the show. Expect lots of Pong, then

Perhaps about as hardcore as UK gaming gets


Do these people not have jobs to go to?



It's air hockey, but not as we know it. It may look daft, but it could be coming to an arcade near you



The simulator can reproduce conflicts from any time period, from Waterloo to The Gulf War

The system will take into account many variables, including fear and injuries. Hence this vehicle

Intriguingly, it will be possible for players to construct their own hardware from existing models

06 PS2 pre-order doors open

UK: It certainly wasn't quite Akihabara, but the start of Sony's controversial PlayStation2 pre-release campaign saw dedication of sorts outside Electronic Boutique's flagship Oxford Street store on September 7. As the doors opened at 7am, a queue of around 35 hardened gamers was waiting patiently in line to fill out the magic form ensuring them a sexy black box come November 24.

Although EB staff wouldn't confirm the exact number, the store's allocation is thought to number 500, 20 per cent of which had been snapped up within the first two hours. Now holders of the blue copy of Sony's quadruplicated carbon-copy pre-order form just have to wait for Sony to confirm their pre-order status and hope there's enough software and peripherals to go round. EB also had an unofficial pre-order form for these, with 27 games apparently available at launch.

07 The Phantom of the arcade

UK: Any **Edge** reader worth their gaming salt will be well-acquainted with the raw charms of air hockey. Graduate of the Royal College of Art's MA in Computer Related Design, Graham Plumb digitised the experience for his degree show, creating *Phantom Limb*. His neat twist, using cameras and projectors to swap players' hands, has caught the attention of two major coin-op manufacturers. Both are interested in developing *Limb* to full coin-op status. Plumb's fingers, and indeed hands, are crossed. Find more info at http://www.crd.rca.ac.uk/~graham/

08 Reality of war hits home

UK: A combat simulator evolved from decision support software developed by DERA (the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency) to support the British Army is to be harnessed for the games market. Ex soldier and founder of www.battlelab2000.com **Patrick Benham-Crosswell** promises that the player will interface with the simulation via a PC and the Internet with a large number of players being able to exist in the same game. The software can simulate any battle from any war and includes algorithms to control factors such as smoke, explicit ballistics, suppression, full line-of-sight modelling and damage. "If it can happen on a battlefield," asserts Benham-Crosswell, "we can replicate it."

Finally – a proper conversion of *Daytona USA*
One of everyone's favourite coin-ops is coming home again
Bandai's WonderSwan-compatible Wonderborg
Forget Aibo, this bug-like robot is the epitome of toy-tech cool
Jay Kay's PlayStation2 backpack
The Jamiroquai man has a custom portable unit, lucky so and so

Certain entertainment at Sony's ECTS
Table football covered in beer and on uneven flooring
Developers choosing free booze over Ed
Yes, many coders, artists and designers really
Overweight journos enjoying rhythm-actio
If ever there was an excuse to ban *Dance Dance R*

09 The PowerBook

Ali will tell you a tale: a romance in Paris, an affair with Guinevere. Ali is a cyberspace writer, an erotic fantasist, and Jeanette Winterson's 'Orlando' in this modern take on Virginia Woolf's classic novel on the lives and loves of a character that changes gender, time and place with every chapter.

You are entering what Winterson would have you believe is a new reading experience. A celebrated author who boasts a sack full of literary awards, this is a bold experiment to be modern, but one which the ordinary reader may have a hard time to follow. It's the first attempt by a big-name mainstream author to clutch the cyberspace bull by the horns and give it a literary stab. The results are predictably messy.

The concept runs thus: you enter cyberspace and are told stories that change and adapt to you as you read them. Interesting. Only this is a novel, and the ping-pong dialogue style that she uses to mirror online conversation tires your mind with its staccato rhythm. The dialogue is also rife with clichés – which, admittedly, is a fair swipe at the average online chat room – and the stories do not conclude, but rather remain open-ended. Online this may be what you expect, but in a book leaves you with a sense of dissatisfaction.

Tucked between the mayhem hide Winterson's meditations on love and life to reward the devoted reader. Early on one voice asks: "What's happened to the omniscient author?" The reply: "Gone interactive." Don't buy it. It takes one control freak, omniscient author to say it. (see www.jeanettewinterson.com for an extract)

10 The Emperor's Codes

Hot on the heels of 'Station X' – Smith's best-selling history of the WWII code-breaking effort at Bletchley Park, where the Nazi's Enigma code was cracked, and the first programmable computer was created – comes this new ode to the codebreaker's finesse and mathematical ingenuity.

'The Emperor's Codes' cuts to Japan, a side of the war that is often overshadowed by the battles on the European arena. Here Smith, now intelligence and espionage correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph*, describes the codebreaking efforts of the Allies masterminded by Bletchley Park to thwart Japanese plans and collaborations with Hitler.

Smith has gained access to secret official histories of the time, now filed in Australian, American and British archives. With excerpts and scores of interviews with officers and servicemen still alive today, he tells a gripping tale of cunning and luck in the days before reconnaissance planes, long-range radar and satellite imagery completely changed the face of military intelligence.

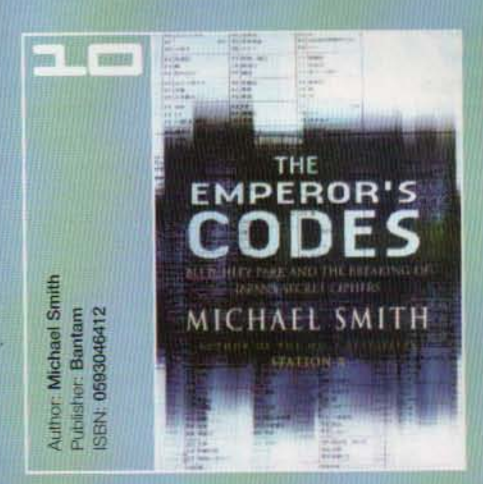
For entertainment value there are some little-known gems thrown in. An entry in Captain Malcolm Kennedy's diary – Japan corres[illegible]dent for Reuters in the '20s and '30s before being seco[illegible]d as a codebreaker to the Bletchley Park for the Japan c[illegible]ing team – reads: 'The All Highest [Churchill] is all over [illegible]he moment for the latest information and indications [illegible]intentions and rings up at all hours of the day and [illegible]s for four hours [and] his chief form of recreation, I [illegible]et out onto the Admiralty roof whenever there is a [illegible]n and shake his fist at the raiders'.

[illegible]h a penchant for British chest-beating histories will [illegible]lenty in here to get up on the tiles and roar about.

09

Author: Jeanette Winterson
Publisher: Jonathan Cape
ISBN: 0224061038

10



Author: Michael Smith
Publisher: Bantam
ISBN: 0593046412

11

Site: **The Stone**
URL: **www.thestone.net**

11 Web site of the month

US: For £15 you get a cheap plastic box containing a stone on a string. Not a particularly wise investment, it would seem. The arcane symbols etched into its surface only serve to reaffirm the suspicion that you're about to slip into a sub-culture populated by live roleplaying Eric Von Daniken fans. But before purchasing your first vial of patchuli oil check out The Stones Web site for an experience even Jonathan Ross recommends. The appeal lies in its mystery – solve interactive puzzles, learn poetry, engage in philosophical questions. The conundrums are ongoing, though eventually lead to an ultimate prize. Could 100,000 stone wearers be wrong?

12

12 Advertainment

Japan: Even something as small as the launch of a new Game Boy title can be built to explosive proportions in Japan, where facial expressions are overdone, and graphics are overlaid on the screen in a mad frenzy. And so it was for the TV campaign which recently accompanied *Zok Zok Heroes*...

01. Ad opens on fairly typical Japanese living room. Kid, playing on his Game Boy: "Damn! Nooo!" 02. "It can't be!" 03. "Oh, nooo!" 04. "It is impossible!" 05. "..." 06. "Okay, there is only one way!" 07. "*Chaaange Uuup!*" 08. Kid's grandmother, picking up Game Boy: "Oh" 09. Grandmother: "Ken-chan..." 10. "... you forgot your..." 11. "... huh?" Kid inserts peripheral 12. "Oh, nooo!" 13. Onscreen graphics: 'Super RPG *Zok Zok Heroes!*' 14. Kid: "Grandma, nooo! Stay cool! Nooo!"

It is day one of ECTS 2000. Sony's booth (it does not have a stand; rather, it prefers to present an enclosure whose carefully lit existence serves to further heighten the mystique of the delights contained within), negotiated via a diminutive portal at the far end of the main hall, is currently playing host to the sweat of hundreds of visitors straining to catch a glimpse – or, if they're lucky, or patient enough, a hands-on taste – of forthcoming PS2 wares in the run up to the November launch date. Several attendees look close to fainting point. To others, even the prospect of momentarily losing consciousness is not enough to hold them back in their quest. Their mission? The acquisition of anything that will not cost them a single penny, be it the view of a pair of fluttering lashes from some slab of hired female flesh squeezed into several inches of logo-emblazoned lycra, or, of far more consequence, something actually tangible. Which is why the route towards the exit of the Sony enclosure has become congested to the point of being almost non-negotiable. You see, a Sony representative – an innocent-looking young man charged with dispensing corporate ephemera to show visitors – has become overwhelmed by hordes threatening to push over the table that stands before him.

"Right! Get back, or no one will be getting anything!" comes the warning, delivered with an oddly humorous mix of authority and thinly veiled panic. The crowd, made up of all manner of male individuals, though most of them apparently under 20, shift their feet guiltily from side to side, making as small amount of concession as they feel they can get away with before the Sony-branded wares are laid out for consumption.

Those quick enough to eventually make a grab for the free merchandise come away with a postcard and a 'Sony Computer Entertainment Europe ECTS 2000 Information Card', a rectangular PC CD-ROM which, once booted, simply directs the user towards the corporate Web site – an activity even the most inane of computer user would find difficult to mess up without supervision.

(Last year an over-enthusiastic punter attempted to make off with an entire container of PlayStation-branded ballpoint pens. Yes, it's that insane.)

This is the 'shop floor' ECTS experience. Away from the corporate hospitality suites, their mini-fridges loaded with refreshments and overstuffed, bite-sized sandwiches, the downtrodden masses make a grab for anything that isn't nailed down.

It is the epitome of the consumer mentality at work. Starved of videogame events aimed solely at the people who fill Electronics Boutiques up and down the country every Saturday afternoon, these chancers log on to the ECTS pre-registration Web site, fabricate company names and positions, and wend their way throughout Olympia's cavernous halls on the hunt for everything, right down to the last leaflet detailing an obscure new Norwegian outfit's proposed move into educational software. (Keep an eye on Web forums in the run up to next year's event if you want to witness the Joe Punter collective machinating a method of sampling ECTS firsthand.)

At the other end of the scale is the infamous Sony party, held every year at astronomical expense by the industry's foremost player right now. This year it was the turn of Jay Kay of Jamiroquai to throw a few shapes on stage and perform a couple of hits before doing the 'My God, you're all young and everything! Christ! I was expecting a load of old salesmen in suits!' bit, which is of course not what every other corporate party performer is told to say.

If liggers at the show itself accounted for around 30 per cent, then maybe one per cent somehow managed to blag a Sony party ticket. Whatever the actual amount, on a night such as the two opposing ends of the scale find common ground: free booze is sunk as though Prohibition is just around the corner, while those lording it in the VIP guest area sit in their grandstand-style seating area sipping on champagne while attempting to politely ignore the consumption of other, slightly more expensive staple party components being undertaken.

If this entire shebang sounds like a bit of a mess, that's because it is. In the grand scheme of things, this industry is an upstart, one which doesn't necessarily appreciate that throwing a party in the distant reaches of London's East End when those wishing to attend are staying many miles away might not make for a productive third day of the show (one particularly hapless-looking fellow RedEye witnessed upon leaving, at around 3am, was brandishing £100 just to capture a ride that would normally command a £30 fare).

In the harsh sunlight of the following day, when most of the important meetings have been bumbled through and scant few freebies remain available for scavengers to feast upon, everyone breathes a sigh of relief that rivals only their hangovers in terms of duration.

REDEYE

Commentary from inside the videogame industry

When things get ugly at ECTS

This year it was the turn of Jay Kay of Jamiroquai to throw a few shapes before doing the 'You're young and everything!' bit

It is impossible to even estimate how much business of any real worth was actually undertaken over ECTS's three days. But it's not difficult to imagine how much more productive an event it would be were it not congested with blagmeisters (the frustration among certain Euro journos when faced with hour-long queues – apparently comprised of 16-year-old company directors – in order to sample Game Boy Advance was unpleasantly evident) and sodden with the levels of alcohol that keep stomach-pump manufacturers in business.

Next year ECTS is set to move from its traditional Kensington venue to a location in Docklands. Having already attended an event at the proposed convention centre, a RedEye confidante cringed at the prospect of tackling an ECTS there. But is it possible that it could be any worse?

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

Time is an inexorable, merciless fact in real life, unless you're travelling at velocities high enough for relativistic effects to become noticeable (in which case this copy of **Edge** would be too heavy to pick up). The ever-increasing temporal pressure imposed upon the working population is in itself a major modern sociopolitical concern. So it is one of the great escapist joys of videogames that in them, time becomes plastic and malleable. Set up your variables in *SimCity* and fast-forward through months of an economic cycle to test your theories; munch a Combat Boost in *Perfect Dark* and execute an enfilade of perfect headshots in slow-motion.

Curious, then, that the two new *Pokémon* games, *Silver* and *Gold*, feature a game-time that is so closely locked to that of the real world. We have seen a few clever mirrorings of calendar time before, amusing Easter Eggs in games such as *Ready 2 Rumble*, where the boxing audience becomes infested with cheering skeletons if you play it on Hallowe'en. But the new *Pokémon* games wire this idea into the very structure of play. Some species of monster are nocturnal, so that you will only see them if you are playing after dark according to the Game Boy's internal clock. There is even a ferry that leaves only on Wednesdays – and you actually do have to catch it on a 'real' Wednesday, or wait a week until your next chance.

What are we to make of such chronological totalitarianism? The cynical view would be that it is a fiendishly clever way to turn the world's children into sleep-deprived, schoolwork-shunning zombies. But if that succeeds, there won't be any affluent, high-earning adults able to buy GameCubes. The entire next generation of videogamers, having wasted their youths on bizarrely compelling 2D nurturing games, will be spending their days ranting on park benches and peering into discarded Sainsbury's bags instead. The industry would go bust.

So, if evil brainwashing isn't the main aim, why else introduce such restrictions? In one way, it seems like a logical way to extend the concept of gameworld persistence. Games have already engineered the illusion of a storyline that continues to evolve in places far from where your character currently is: *Half-Life*, for example, very cunningly lets you happen to 'notice' pre-scripted events. The advantage of such a technique is to make the player feel as though he or she is not just controlling a game, but participating in a larger, quasi-cinematic process – being an actor in a dramatically interesting virtual world. And then there is the paradigm of 'realtime'. Old-fashioned twitch videogames, of course, always were realtime productions: *Asteroids* and *Defender* packed the seconds with purely kinetic play, as do today's racing and beat 'em up productions. But *Metal Gear Solid* was also approximately realtime in both its storyline – one 12-hour stealth mission – and its action sequences.

What about a style of narrative adventure game in which the fictional action unfolds exactly according to the clock minute? This is a seductive gimmick already toyed with by other artforms. It can be approximated in novels, such as Henry Sutton's recent 'Flying', which is supposed to take the same amount of time to read as it does to fly from London to New York and back – and that is just what the book's characters are doing. In films, the most famous example is Hitchcock's 'Rope'; realtime action also features in Mike Figgis's recent 'Timecode', and three times over in the brilliant German film 'Run Lola Run'. There, Lola mysteriously seems to learn from her previous mistakes when the clock winds back for her to try again: a 'Groundhog Day'-style idea that has now cropped up in *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*, which takes place in what we might term 'accelerated realtime'. The next step would indeed seem to be a game where it appears that stuff carries on happening even when you're not playing. The illusion of a persistent world that chugs along according to its own internal laws would then be greatly increased. Massively multiplayer games such as *Ultima Online* evolve exactly in this way regardless of the absence of any one individual contributor. To simulate such world autonomy in a solo game is likely, therefore, also to increase the sense of a gameworld populated by other wills, other consciousnesses than your own.

But this also necessarily limits our freedom. Why should a game be locked so arbitrarily to one axis of real-world physics when everything else about it is so seductively fantastic? For a start, it would rule out the kind of widescreen, globe-trotting storyline that games such as *GoldenEye* or *Final Fantasy* boast. Just as the classical Aristotelian unities of drama that became fashionable in 17th century England were eventually dropped because of their choking restrictions (the action of the play had to happen in one location over a timespan of no more than 24 hours), the temporal concertinas that we observe in epic games and, of course, films – where we cut from one day or week to the next in a fraction of a second – are a function of dramatic efficiency: they enable the director to pack more interesting elements in without dwelling on the boring bits.

TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Time: keeps on slipping

Pressure of time is a major concern. It is one of the great escapist joys of videogames that in them, time becomes plastic and malleable

The proper beauty of a videogame is precisely that it is so independent from the quotidian irritations of real life. A game that slavishly parallels real calendar time becomes a task to be timetabled along with those of school or work. The glory of videogaming ought still to be that it allows you to escape from time, to pack a week's worth of imaginary adventuring into a couple of hours. There'll be time enough to worry about what day it is later.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate, £12). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

profile

Videogaming's movers and shakers

J Allard

General manager, X-Box platform, Microsoft

Having already brought his influence to bear on Microsoft's Internet strategy, J Allard now finds himself in a unique position to shape the future of another dimension of the company, as one of the key individuals involved in determining the Seattle giant's entry into the videogame space. Currently responsible for overseeing the development of the console's operating system and generating the development libraries and kits, as well as supporting the development community, he is also in charge of managing the X-Box title portfolio.

So it may concern readers who, like **Edge**, are looking forward to the launch of the console to know that he made his reputation within the company as 'Microsoft's Father of the Internet'. Rest assured, though, that far from appointing a bumbling arriviste, Microsoft is in fact rewarding a longstanding passion for videogames.

Allard joined as the company's first Internet employee in 1991, having discovered the joys of networked technology at college. First coming to the attention of top executives with a memo entitled 'Windows: The Killer Application for the Internet', he went on from creating an FTP and Web server for Windows NT to develop several industry standards, and was elected to serve on the Internet Architecture Board in 1993. So what prompted him to move? "I determined that success with the Internet would be when my mom could send me email, because my mom is very technophobic and afraid of the thing. For nine years I focused on that, and now she sends me more email than I care for. I decided to come back to my roots."

Indeed, the Internet was not the only future technology Allard identified the potential of. He still remembers trying to convince 3DO's Trip Hawkins that 3D graphics would revolutionise the way games are played: "Three weeks after EA started, when I talked to Trip about my 3D graphics engine at the time and I thought that 3D graphics was going to be big, Trip had other comments about it."

Having started playing games with a Magnavox Odyssey, it wasn't too great a leap to start to write them in the early '80s. Thus A+ Software was born in 1983, which specialised in selling twitch titles on audio cassettes. Although now lost in the mists of time, it is tempting to think what the future would have held for the company had a mooted takeover of the equally fledgling EA taken place in 1986. You can but speculate, for it was shortly after this point that Allard departed the scene to devote his energies to networking.

Having returned to the fold, it is interesting to think what effect his background will have on the direction takes X-Box develops in the future: "I think there is more room for twitch gaming in the console space. There might be a chance for resurgence here."

Edge's most wanted

Anarchy Online
The hype generated by Funcom's sci-fi MMORPG has reached the **Edge** office, and not just because of the latex giant on show at the company's ECTS booth.

(PC) Funcom

Sega Marine Fishing
As **Edge** continues to promote the virtues of Get Bass as a social experience to anyone who'll listen, the prospect of this multi-fish sequel is exciting.

(DC) Sega

Mario Kart Advance
Only 33 per cent complete at ECTS, but easily the game generating the longest queues. Graphically superior to the SNES version and handling beautifully.

(GBA) Nintendo

Herdy Gerdy
A sumptuous Disney-esque game environment to explore. Herdy must accept challenges to restore order to his world and herd creatures in the process.

(PS2) Eidos

Fears for tears

Mistaking passion for emotion

The ingenious naming of PlayStation2's central processing unit has generated much speculation about whether and when emotional responses to games can be generated. Clearly, two of this month's PS2 prescreens – *The Bouncer* (below) and *Dropship* – are titles which are unlikely to deliver the emotional experiences Sony executives have been hinting at.

However, the obvious answer to the 'emotion' question is that good videogames have always generated passion and feeling. From *Moon Cresta*'s tense docking sequence to the cruelly orchestrated points distribution in *Mario Kart*, videogames have always generated anger, stress and – upon completing the gantry level in *GoldenEye* – euphoria.

Yet these sudden bursts of feeling aren't really what the gaming community was interested in when discussions concerning emotional content began. Imagine a game, the argument ran, where you feel such a close kinship with the main characters that your very psychology is in tune with theirs. They experience fear, you experience fear; they feel pain, you flinch. The subtle mixture of music, photorealistic graphics, quality scripting and assured direction would ensure that your involvement became more intense and, dare it be suggested, like experiencing a film.

There is a fundamental problem with all this. The film industry may seem like a sound model to mimic, but a moment's reflection reveals that this could be a dangerous route to follow. Yes, movie techniques such as eerie camera angles (*Alone in the Dark*) and intercutting (*Metal Gear Solid*) have been used successfully, but if gamers want to identify with game characters with the intensity experienced in a film, then emotions are going to have to be manipulated along preset paths. Movie directors are justifiably precious about their art: take out one scene, or alter the tone of a segment of dialogue, and the magic can be lost.

Movies have evolved over the last century into the most popular form of emotional manipulation. Videogames have traditionally tapped into a very different part of the psyche to provide a mixture of quick thrills and cerebral challenges. Should movies and videogames ever be brought together? Is giving a generation of stressed businessmen the opportunity to wail over a digital heroine a good thing?

No matter how strong the visuals or stirring the audio, fuse the two and you're left with the mutant hybrid beloved of a best-forgotten generation: interactive movies.

Dropship

Sony's Team Camden invites you to engage your tactical brain as well as your trigger finger in an RTS title that promises to iron out some of the problems with the genre

Each craft will have its own handling characteristics and weapon capabilities. Having the opportunity to control vehicles from a firstperson perspective will distinguish *Dropship* from most other RTS titles

It's heartening to see that several titles combining both action and tactics are already being developed on PS2. Apart from Westwood's *Command & Conquer* series, strategical reasoning is something few PlayStation owners ever had to face. Evidence, perhaps, that Sony sees its next-gen platform reaching out to gamers who have matured since the heady days of *Ridge Racer* in 1995.

It's unlikely that *Dropship* will require Kasparovian levels of forethought and mental intensity, but the ability to take complete command over your entire force will demand both quick reflexes and an ability to plan well ahead. Little about plot or setting have been revealed apart from the game taking place in a futuristic context with missions including surveillance, escort, stealth, and patrol.

Playable code at ECTS revealed stunning draw distance and detailed textures. Mountains which in another era were but picturesque prerenders are now elements of consequence: travel towards a peak in the cloudy distance and later you would find yourself beginning to ascend to its summit; all of which is relevant to the game mechanics, which will enable more sagacious gamers to use the vagaries of terrain to their advantage.

Everything currently moves at a silky 60fps, and the vehicles **Edge** saw operated with differing handling characteristics. Troop carriers were squat and heavy, lumbering across the planet's surface; the more

Dropship has come a long way since E3, and the impressive attention to detail and smooth frame rates augur well for the title

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **In-house (Team Camden)**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q3 2001**

It is unlikely that *Dropship* will require the digestion of a thick manual to understand its finer points. Team Camden will want the action to be accessible and fun

The craft modelling is excellent and the draw distance impressive. Simple gauges will indicate factors such as altitude and the damage to specific parts of the vehicle. Deciding when to refuel and repair will be crucial

capricious buggy flirts with the terrain, cresting hills and falling to the ground with greater energy. These are required qualities in any driving game, but are flourishes which should set *Dropship* apart from its wargame competitors. Hopefully the gameplay nuances such handling brings will be extensive. Deciding how to get troops across a particular rocky and treacherous escarpment may depend on the vehicles at your disposal.

Flying the many craft in the game is reminiscent of 16bit helicopter sims, though with obvious graphical improvements. The HUD is straightforward, with a targeting system and digital readouts. You can lock on to targets with weapons, and explosions use the impressive lighting effects which are already becoming commonplace on PS2.

Tactical decisions have to be made in a strictly realtime structure. Though the escalation of a war taking place has still not been implemented, Team Camden promises that there will be a blend of arcade blasting and thoughtful deliberation. The team asserts that the player will never be left wondering what to do. In order to complete any given mission a degree of tactical nous will have to be used. The team has also ensured that caring for your troops is paramount – complete a mission well and survivors gain experience.

Potentially the most thrilling aspect of *Dropship* will reside not in the deployment of units but in the movement between them, whereby the player will be able to make the transition from omnipresent commander to unit controller. This hasn't always succeeded in the past; *Dogs of War* employed a similar mechanism, but its interface proved too clumsy and elaborate. Attempting to give orders, set group tactics and then fly a craft into a danger zone is perhaps asking too much, and only competent AI will enable the player to go on a sortie of their own devising. Leaving suicidal troops, or, worse, completely blind, deaf and dumb ones back at a key instalment to soak up sniper bullets has spoiled RTS games in the past.

One of the more impressive aspects of *Dropship* is the ability to fly both troops and vehicles to advantageous locations. Team Camden uses the image of Russian dolls to convey how important this element will be. Troops can be packed into a troop carrier which is then loaded on the dropship. The dropship then descends to a planet's surface from the stratosphere – a sequence which will constitute a gameplay element once implemented – and then the combination of vehicles can be offloaded and assigned commands.

Dropship has come a long way since its E3 debut (**E**84) and the impressive attention to detail and smooth frame rates, which have been realised after just a few short months, augur well for the title. With the addition of a slick interface and convincing AI, this could be a title to bring a much-needed dose of mental agility to the console market.

Seeing the wood for the trees

Since E3 it is clear that Team Camden has invested a great deal of time in working on the textures in the game. The surface of the planets is incredibly detailed, and the developer boasts that some 400 million trees currently populate the gameworld, with no discernible decrease in performance. As the playing area is so large (some 40kmx40km) the ability to use skirmish or hit-and-run tactics will be catered for.

Sin And Punishment

Spaceworld's game of the show emerged effortlessly from Japan's premier shoot 'em up developer, displaying the assets long associated with the company's output

Treasure's shoot 'em up pedigree is evident throughout the proceedings – opportunities, such as this swarm of flying Lufian, for scoring high hit chains are numerous

Given the limited time allowed to play Treasure's adrenaline injection that is *Sin And Punishment* (a side effect of the regimented nature of Japanese videogame exhibitions), no one **Edge** observed got further than this frantic elevator section

Avoiding the franchise whore that is PlayStation like the plague, Treasure has for several years now continued its lone mission to supply gamers who have grown disheartened by the abysmal lack of innovation in the majority of shoot 'em ups with sublimely original and playable two-dimensional examples of the genre. The excellence – both from a technical and gameplay aspect – of the Saturn's *Radiant Silvergun* and *Yuke Yuke Trouble Makers* on the N64 only truly revealed itself to those prepared to immerse themselves in the worlds masterfully designed by the developer. Given this track record, you would expect Treasure to deliver another memorable experience with its latest 64bit project, and judging by a near-complete version at the recent Spaceworld event (see p66), the developer appears not to have lost its fine touch.

As is now the trend, cut-scenes utilising an in-game engine carry the plot forward. Once again, the action is set in the future. The megapolis that Tokyo has turned into has been overrun by the Lufian, mutant beings that were once bred to bolster the nation's food production, who now look intent on focusing their unwholesome attention on the human population. Enter 14-year-old Saki Amemiya and 15-year-old Airan Jo, an anime-styled duo schooled in the art of Lufian elimination.

All this matters little when you turn to consider the gameplay. Unlike Treasure's recent efforts, the action is three-dimensional and mostly on rails, meaning that your character is forcibly taken through th stage, though when faced with multiple adversaries or one of the mid level bosses the scenery stops moving until you've cleared the obs Control is therefore geared towards the game's relentless drive – y get a limited say in forward/backward travel, but more important

Format: **Nintendo 64**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Treasure**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **October (Japan)**

A twoplayer mode is included, though Nintendo wasn't willing to show it at Spaceworld. Due to the on-rails nature of the title, a splitscreen mode is unlikely

As you're continuously being pushed forward, the joypad's analogue stick controls the crosshair, while the C buttons are used for all the sideways motion

Of all the games at Spaceworld, *Sin and Punishment* stood out for its mix of a frenetic, remorseless gameplay tempo and quality visuals

use of the shoulder and C buttons, which enable you to jump and roll out of the way of enemy fire. Of course, this wouldn't be a Treasure game without an interesting variety of power-ups, and along with a variety of weapons, life energy and temporary power boosts appear throughout play.

Even playing the game for short periods under strict Japanese show rules was enough to establish the game's distinctive pace – within seconds of starting the action on top of a skyscraper the Z button is almost constantly pushed into its socket. Opponents appear on foot, in the air, or on top of structures (which can be destroyed), and continue to do so until the first sub-boss shows up. The only time you're afforded a breather is during one of the cut-scenes. You then run through a field with a fire-red skyline, shooting down as many of the fire-demon snakes that dominate the screen as your eye-hand coordination skills allow before jumping on an elevator and avoiding the shower of bullets emanating from the enemy's machine gun barrels that ›resumably populate every level on the 256Mb cartridge.

Of all the games at Spaceworld, *Sin And Punishment* stood out for ›x of a frenetic, remorseless gameplay tempo and exquisite visuals. ›tle is likely to shift significant units of N64s ever again, this ›ould at least excite existing owners of the console.

Later levels display a pleasing amount of graphical variety, which won't come as a surprise to Treasure fans – in fact, everything here looks a little too restrained

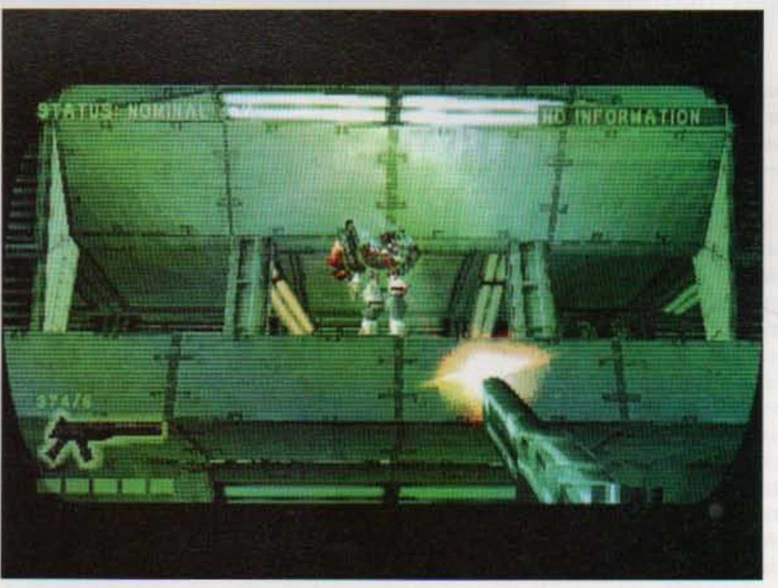
Forget me not

While, at the time of writing, Nintendo has yet to confirm a US or European release for *Sin And Punishment*, you'd expect the company to show sense for once and deliver what is likely to constitute one of the last N64 titles worth owning to a gaming public that has remained loyal despite (in the UK at least) being largely ignored over the last couple of years. Besides, the game's samples are in English, which would make the localisation process that bit smoother.

c-12

Aliens have invaded the Earth once again, and this time a man named Vaughan is tasked with routing the scourge, but beneath this title's clichéd exterior lurks promise

Three-dimensional world, heavy-duty weaponry and big ugly flying aliens: *c-12* has them all. But it also currently has disappointingly empty buildings. Hopefully the clichéd narrative won't extend to the finished gameplay



Of all the games **Edge** has come across in recent times, *c-12* exudes a genuine Hollywood-style actioner feel (but hopefully with far more substance along with it)

If Earth was really as prone to extraterrestrial invasion as videogames suggest, you'd be forgiven for thinking the time would long since have come to to lead a French Resistance-style march all the way to the nearest Bastille-esque edifice and demand the old order be toppled. (Or at least invest in some decent ground-to-air defences.) However, the cult of the loner videogame hero routing the aliens continues, as *c-12* adheres to all known clichés.

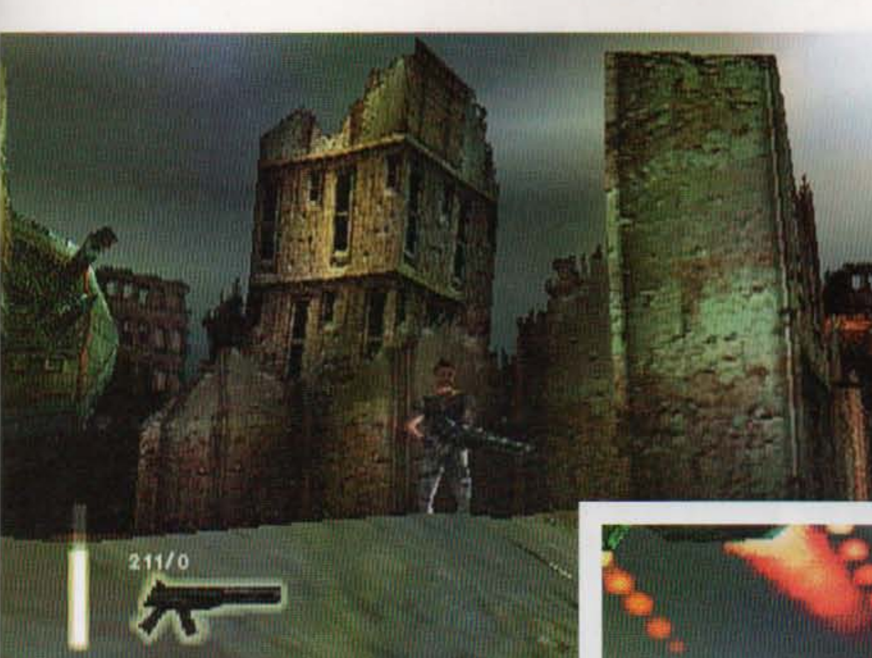
In this case, the big man's name is Vaughan. Having witnessed the systematic elimination of all large-scale terrestrial defences, the destruction of all major cities followed by the reprogramming and re-engineering of captured humans into powerful cyborg warriors or mindless slaves by the invading gangs of technologically superior aliens looking to rid Earth of all its carbon supplies, Vaughan has something of an itchy trigger finger. After Colonel Grisham and Major Carter of the world's highest profile resistance outfit are taken hostage after a failed guerrilla attack on the local alien base, Lieutenant Vaughan re-engages the enemy in a desperate rescue attempt. The mission, while not entirely successful, does manage to save Grisham from a future as alien food.

However, with his squad annihilated and no sign of Carter, Vaughan is forced to return only 50 per cent successful. Assuming the worst, Mrs Carter continues her research on recovered alien technology as a way of highlighting possible weaknesses. While her conclusion that adoption of this technology is required in order to battle the vastly superior enemy is predictable, with only one fully functioning alien-imaging unit available a suitable candidate must be selected.

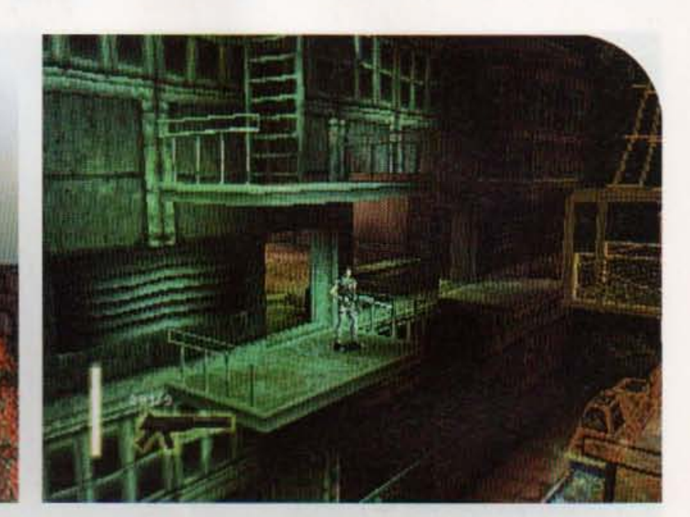
Thankfully, *c-12*'s thirdperson oneplayer adventure action looks far more promising than its narrative suggests. Currently only halfway through development, the game uses a tweaked version of the *MediEvil* engine, largely because the team behind it has previously delivered the two entertaining episodes featuring Sir Daniel Fortesque for Sony's 32bit box, and was confident it could recycle the technology. Another added bonus is that this allows for more time to be focused on arguably more important developmental aspects, such as gameplay.

Perhaps predictably, certain elements from Studio Cambridge's past efforts can be found in the developer's latest project, which would go some way to explain the block-pulling section witnessed at ECTS, indicating a do

Format: **PlayStation**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **In-house (Studio Cambridge)**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **2001**



As far as setting the usual post-apocalyptic scene, Team Cambridge has done an impressive job: Vaughan's world is in desperate need of a structural makeover



This title's thirdperson oneplayer adventure action looks far more promising than its narrative would initially lead you to believe

of disappointingly light puzzle solving. Nevertheless, everything else appeared to emphasise the game's penchant for action – the hero runs around shooting anything remotely cyborg-like with remarkable abandon, be they remorseless two-metre-tall bipedal entities, sizeable bosses, or some of the flying units that appear to clutter the suitably gloomy exteriors. As in *Syphon Filter*, adversaries occasionally attack from the relative security of a building roof, though the automatic lock-on feature should make disposing of such sniping cowards elementary. As ever, expect a comprehensive array of tools with which to do the job, such as silenced assault sub-machine guns, sniper rifles and a bazooka, to name but three.

While this clearly isn't the most original idea for a game, you get the feeling *c-12* isn't far from what a genuine 3D update of the SNES's *Contra III* would look and feel like. As anyone familiar with the 16bit classic will know, that is an exciting prospect.

The grass is always greener...

One of the neater touches built into *c-12* is the ability to enter seemingly any of the game buildings that surround you, which is still something of a rarity in videogaming, despite it being one of the features most often requested by gamers. The frustration sometimes inherent on being apparently surrounded by options, only to be pushed down an evidently rigidly predetermined path, is one that isn't easily set to one side. In *c-12* this isn't the case, but, somewhat ironically – and, indeed, reminiscent of so may situations in real life – the chances are you won't find a lot of action awaiting you inside those walls. The PlayStation's technical limitations clearly make it impossible to generate densely populated environments – a significant loss.

Type X: Spiral Nightmare

Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4 2000**

Experience survival horror aboard a Mars spacestation in a game where making friends and influencing people is just as important as hastening their shuffle off this mortal coil

Survival horror, when executed well, can be one of the most creative and immersive genres: witness the awesomely well-designed *Alien Resurrection* (**E**89). *Type X: Spiral Nightmare* – though set in a better-lit world and viewed from an entirely thirdperson perspective – clearly draws its themes from the same sources: dark science fiction, intense claustrophobia, and a deep, all-pervading terror.

The year is 2078, and three engineers – Johann Goodman, Jessica Streep, and Rod Stare – are on their way to an orbital spacestation around Mars. They're under orders to fix a broken turbine, but while they're inspecting the station they encounter an aggressive alien presence. Fleeing, the team's only chance of escape is to make it out of their ship and to the planet surface.

The player takes control of Goodman, and though much of the playing time concerns itself with his battle against his new-found enemies, equally important is how he deals with the 20 or so characters he meets en route to the climax of the game. Using an engine dubbed the 'Emotional Communication System', the game responds to the player's reactions to its nonplayer characters and changes aspects and goals accordingly. Regardless of whether the game is played under the guise of a joyful Goodman or a surly one, a single play through *Type X* won't present everything it has to offer.

Type X's battle system takes its inspiration from, unsurprisingly, the *Resident Evil* series. Damage inflicted on an enemy will be apportioned to the relevant body part which, if attacks are concentrated in that area, can be destroyed. The methods of attack can vary, according to both player preference and the situation they find themselves in, from using acid or freezing the enemy to the more standard shooting and explosive weaponry. Satisfyingly, much of the background scenery can also be destroyed.

Once a battle is won, DNA can be sampled from the body of victims, and formed it into a kind of grenade to launch at future opponents. Different types of DNA carry different effects, and it's possible to combine separate strands to form new, original DNA that offers a new form of attack.

Weird, yes, but *Type X* strives to be different from the clawing *Resident Evil*-cloned competitors. As demonstrated in *Alien Resurrection* and *System Shock 2*, the silence-and-scream dynamic is terrifying. Becoming sufficiently well structured to rival the cinematic kings of the genre remains *Type X*'s biggest challenge.

Enemies aren't just randomly spread around the *Type X* world, but react to the location of the engineering team and alter their movement and attack patterns accordingly, though whether their awareness of Johann's is limited to line of sight, crude radar or a global, all-seeing, 'cheat' view isn't known

Sega Strike Fighter

Format: Coin-o
Publisher: Seg
Developer: In-house (Wow Entertainmen
Origin: Japa
Release: Q4 Octob

While it shares a cabinet with jumbo sim Airlines Pilot, Sega's new coin-op swaps cruising at altitude with low-flying jet fighting – and it may yet land on Dreamcast

Anyone with fond memories of *Afterburner* shouldn't get too excited – this isn't exactly a true update in all but name. However, there is plenty of fun to be had throwing the plane around the screen as a way of inducing sea sickness in those watching. With the right additions, a home port would complement an already impressive Christmas DC line-up

Utilising a three-screen cabinet suspiciously similar to AM1-developed *Airlines Pilot*, *Sega Strike Fighter* leaves the humdrum world of commercial flying plodding along in its vapou trail as it engages the afterburner and sets its sights squarely on the arguably more exciting gameplay premise of jet fighting. As a pilot of the US Navy's F-18 Hornet, three choices face you before you're let loose in the detailec 3D environment to roll, bank and dogfight with the best of them.

If you've never flown an F-18 before – pretty likely, presumably – then the Training option may be your best bet. Here, seven lessons cover the main aspects of aircraft control followed by essentials of air combat, such as missile launch and gun operation. While there's no time limit to stress you out, the faster you complete the lessons, the higher the points at the end of the course.

Like the Expert option, the Standard play mode focuses solely on combat, namely aerial encounters and air-to-ground attacks: clearing a mission is a simple case of destroying the designated number of targets outlined during the briefing screens. While your path through the missions depends on your choice of difficulty setting, in a move reminiscent of Sega's own *G360* hydraulic stomach-churning coin-op, the final undertaking for both requires you to land on an aircraft carrier (with day/night variation). Yet before that the game can end should you wander off the map, exhaust your supply of weapons, run out of time or get shot down. On the other hand, bonus missions enable you to recover health while boosting your score sky high.

Also predictable is the display, which offers the usual speed, altitude, weapon status, damage, radar, score, time and number of targets left information. Slightly more interesting is the complexity of the unit's cabinet itself, complete with rudder pedals, thrust lever and a variety of switches operating air brakes, cannon fire and missile launch. While the view can be altered, there is an additional joystick simulating the pilot's head orientation, enabling you to look around your cockpit – useful when chasing that next bogey. Hardly the kind of stuff to write home about, but what the title may lack in innovation it certainly attempts to make up in excitement. With the right additional features, such as a cable link option, the potential for Dreamcast-powered Top Gunnery shouldn't be overlooked.

Final Fantasy IX

Format: **PlayStation**
Publisher: **SquareSoft**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Out now (Japan) January 2001 (UK)**

Square's stunning series reaches the end of its PS1 run and returns to its pre-Sony stylings, but remains true to the successful formula

The flirtation with the dark teenage angst that covered episode eight with metallic lustre and grime is officially over. *Final Fantasy* has returned to its roots: out goes the guns 'n' sorcery industrial chic, in come the shiny swords and big-headed characters that so successfully marked the pre-Sony outings of the series. Stylistically, this marks a big U-turn for Square, but elsewhere the game sticks to the five-million-selling formula offered by instalments seven and eight.

This is turn-based combat in the prerendered settings of a graphic adventure. The player must explore a series of lusciously depicted scenes, talk to characters within them, and collect objects which they'll need to turn to their advantage in battles against increasingly tough enemies. In keeping with the *Final Fantasy* feel, it's the deftly woven plot more than the limited play experience that provides the driving force.

The kingdom of Alexandria is under tyrannical rule by the evil and suitably grotesque Queen Brahme. She's also using magical weapons to terrorise neighbouring kingdoms, and it's up to the adventurers to stop her. Those familiar with the series so far won't be surprised to learn that Brahme's threats are merely part of a larger plot: a powerful sorcerer, Kuja, has been supplying her with weaponry, and the main quest soon turns to him and his motives.

The combat is strategically and aesthetically almost identical to that of the two previous versions of the game, although the animations that accompany each attack appear to have been speeded up – some relief after hour-long battles in the previous titles. Another minor change occurs in the character system, being more item-centric than before. Weapons, shield, armour, accessories, and armlets are all available in both standard and magical forms, and tailoring your equipment's attributes to those of your player looks set to form an important part of *Final Fantasy IX*'s challenge.

Fans will notice more tweaks: spells, which initially must be equipped before battle, can be learned after repeated use. The junctioning system of *Final Fantasy VIII* is gone, replaced with the character's natural abilities (such as Zidane's ability to steal) and the Sacred Beasts, which can be summoned. Other, more cosmetic tweaks add a cuter feel to the game: saved games are now handled by Mogs, tiny creatures who also deal with in-game communication between separated players via a postal system, MogNet.

Essentially, though, *Final Fantasy IX* – the last instalment of the phenomenally successful series to appear on the 32bit PlayStation – looks to offer exactly the same as *Final Fantasy VII* and *VIII*: a complex, multi-layered plot on top of simple, single-stream gameplay.

The pastel-coloured fantasy-scapes of *FFIX* are a stylistic departure from the darkness of *FFVIII*

The superdeformed 'big head' style marks a return to earlier episodes of the series. Parties in *FFIX* can now be composed of up to four people, one more than the last two games, making combat more complex and frantic

Finding a new angle

There are eight playable characters included in the game, with the lead being Zidane, a 16-year-old thief with an eye for the ladies and a slightly disturbing tail. Action swiftly cuts between him and the other protagonists, to the extent that at points – especially during the beginning of the four-disc epic adventure – you can find yourself controlling characters working towards opposing goals (for example, sequentially playing as both the chaser and the chased). At other points, switching between playable characters in order to take a different angle on the quest being undertaken can provide the clues necessary for progression.

Cosmic Smash

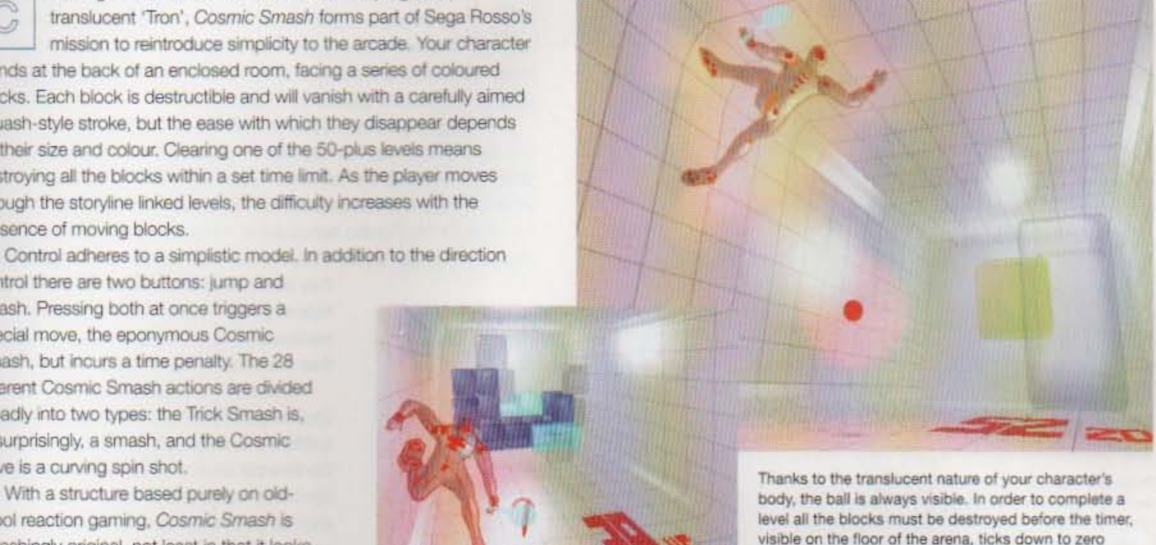
Format: **Coin-op**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **In-house (Sega Rosso)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **October**

Sega brings future squash to the arcade scene, reintroducing the general public to old-skool reaction gaming. The bonus is that European gamers get to try their hands first

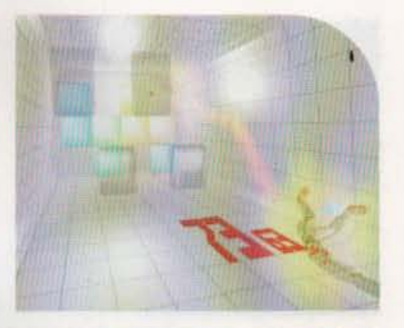
Crossing *Arkanoid* with *Virtua Tennis* and styling it like a translucent 'Tron', *Cosmic Smash* forms part of Sega Rosso's mission to reintroduce simplicity to the arcade. Your character stands at the back of an enclosed room, facing a series of coloured blocks. Each block is destructible and will vanish with a carefully aimed squash-style stroke, but the ease with which they disappear depends on their size and colour. Clearing one of the 50-plus levels means destroying all the blocks within a set time limit. As the player moves through the storyline linked levels, the difficulty increases with the presence of moving blocks.

Control adheres to a simplistic model. In addition to the direction control there are two buttons: jump and smash. Pressing both at once triggers a special move, the eponymous Cosmic Smash, but incurs a time penalty. The 28 different Cosmic Smash actions are divided broadly into two types: the Trick Smash is, unsurprisingly, a smash, and the Cosmic Drive is a curving spin shot.

With a structure based purely on old-skool reaction gaming, *Cosmic Smash* is refreshingly original, not least in that it looks set to be released in Europe before the rest of the world.



Thanks to the translucent nature of your character's body, the ball is always visible. In order to complete a level all the blocks must be destroyed before the timer, visible on the floor of the arena, ticks down to zero



Unison

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Tecmo**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4 2000**

As the flow of Japanese Bemani titles continues unabated, now is your chance to take control of a wide-eyed troupe of wannabe dancers and shepherd them to fame

The cute'n'colourful graphics are similar to (and no better than) the Dreamcast's *Cool Cool Toon* (p102). The gameplay, however, requires using the two analogue sticks of the PlayStation 2, and a Dreamcast version is unlikely

A rhythm-action title on the PlayStation2, *Unison* follows a group of young girls who want to be successful dancers. The player controls their movements through use of both analogue sticks: patterned commands are displayed and must be reproduced perfectly for a maximum score. Each move is ranked from Miss to Perfect according to the level of timing exhibited, and then a cumulative final rating ranging from A to E.

Levels consist of a lesson, where moves are taught and practiced, followed by the performance proper. As well as the standard play mode, *Unison* includes a View mode that enables the player to observe and study the full choreography, using the L and R triggers to rewind and fast-forward the visuals. Also available is a Hint mode in which a teacher prompts the player at particularly difficult moments.

Graphically, *Unison* outstrips all its rivals, though this is somewhat superfluous to the head-twisting analogue action. The inclusion of a basic RPG element allows the heroines to travel from location to location and meet – and presumably dance with – new people, but whether this twist is enough to see *Unison* thrive in a market that appears to be struggling in both coin-op and console forms is questionable.

Confidential Mission

Format: Coin-o
Publisher: Seg
Developer: In-house (Hitmake
Origin: Japa
Release: Q4 200

Choose to operate within the law or opt to summarily execute wrongdoers in this James Bond-esque lightgun coin-op which strictly adheres to the *Time Crisis* format

Those experienced with *Virtua Cop*'s targeting system will be on familiar ground here. As the markers on the circle move closer together, the target turns from green to red, and the enemy prepares to open fire on you

Confidential Mission takes you on a lightgun-based shoot 'em up through a James Bond-inspired gameworld. Choosing between dashing gent Harry Gibson or the unsurprisingly pretty Jean Clifford, the player must lock and drop innumerable bad guys throughout the game's three stages.

The targeting system is as in *Virtua Cop 2*, with the sight changing colour when an opponent is about to fire. Pacifists can take to disarming criminals with hand shots, and will qualify for a Justice bonus while the more murderous will prefer killing with three successive rapid-fire shots for the Combo bonus points. Hapless civilians, the bane of the dedicated lightgun jockey's life, make their presence heavily felt here as they all demonstrate different reactions in the face of gunfire – some flee, some stand paralysed by fear. It's impossible to predict their movements, and a cool head is vital.

Innovation in this genre of game is rare and, despite the occasional chance to take a different route or participate in a mini-game, *Confidential Mission* reinforces the gameplay dynamic's conservative image – ironic in such an ultra-violent genre. Regardless, as derivative as it may seem, the tried and tested *Time Crisis* format seems bound to attract attention in arcades.

Z2

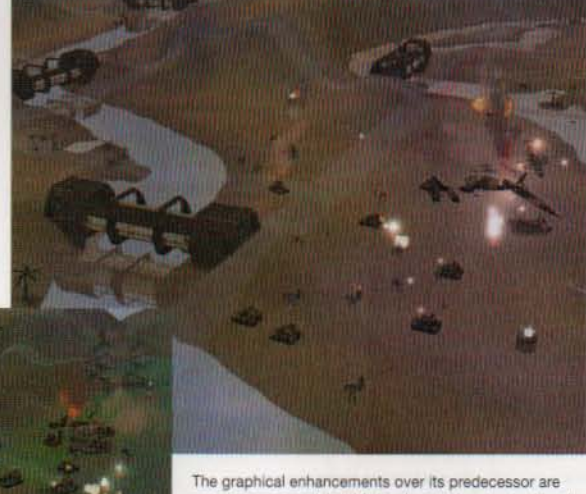
Format: P
Publisher: EON Digital Entertainmer
Developer: Bitmap Brother
Origin: U
Release: March 200

Sequel to hugely popular futuristic wargame *Z* shows up at ECTS displaying all of the improvements you'd associate with a five-year development gap

Those who rightfully regarded *Z*'s AI to be one of the title's strengths over the competition will be delighted to hear the sequel is smarter still. Before you have had a chance to realise this firsthand, you're likely to have noticed that the game is now in 3D. The visual difference between this latest instalment and the original may have a lot to do with the latter's infamous release date delays, but the undulating texture-mapped landscape, the detailed warring machinery, and some tremendous lighting effects, shouldn't fail to surprise.

It hasn't taken five years to come up with simply cosmetic changes. The whole play area has been increased, new weapons and vehicles (air, naval and land units) await your commands and the best strategies your tactical mind can conjure. As ever, the gameplay stands apart from the usual management resource obsession of other RTS titles, focusing instead on dividing each map into territories you claim control of by capturing the central flag.

Work continues and with the latest publisher change (*Z2* was originally under the GTI and Infogrames umbrella before signing with EON Digital), the team can at least concentrate on the crucial refinement of the play elements. Spring will tell whether *Z2* delivers all it promises.



The graphical enhancements over its predecessor are naturally expected, but it's hard not to be shocked by the advancements made when you take another look at the original's aesthetic make up (see **E**36). Wisely, the team hasn't fooled too much with the design of *Z2*'s prequel, thus hopefully ensuring the playability remains intact

Tomb Raider: Chronicles

Format: **PC/PlayStation/Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Core Design**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **November 2000**

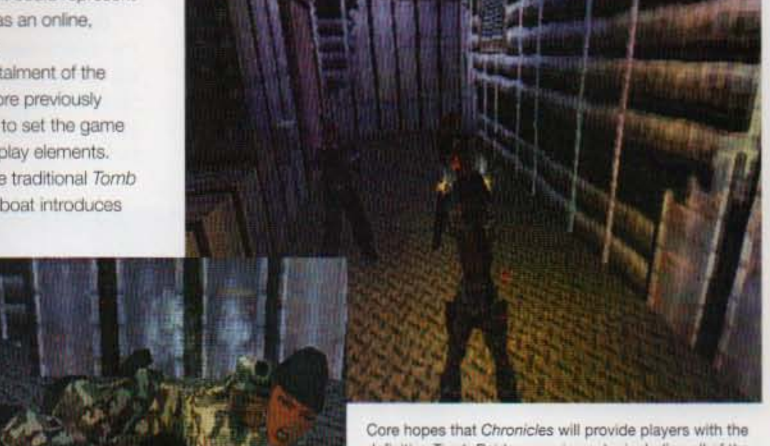
Lara makes (presumably) her last outing on PlayStation as she returns from the dead to scamper around Rome, Ireland and a hi-tech tower block

Before Lara Croft is resurrected on 128bit hardware, Core Design hopes to provide a fitting epilogue to her PlayStation exploits. *Tomb Raider: Chronicles* looks like it could represent the apogee of the franchise, before Lara is reworked as an online, episodic character aimed at a more mature audience.

Set after her 'death' at the end of the previous instalment of the series, a memorial service is used as a device to explore previously unseen episodes in Lara's life, enabling the developer to set the game in different environments, and to introduce new gameplay elements.

Rome provides the backdrop for levels that feature traditional *Tomb Raider*-style running and leaping, before a German U-boat introduces an 'X-Files' theme to the mix. A 16-year-old Lara must use cunning and guile to escape a small island, until, finally, the catsuited heroine must stealthily navigate a hi-tech tower block.

New moves include the ability to tightrope walk, and Lara gets her hands on a grappling hook. New objects to interact with include a chest of drawers that can be searched, while objects can be combined, such as a piece of cloth and chloroform. Dreamcast owners can rest assured that the title will not be simply a PlayStation port, while PC gamers will benefit from a level editor.



Core hopes that *Chronicles* will provide players with the definitive *Tomb Raider* experience by including all of the features that contributed to the success of previous titles alongside newer elements, such as improved AI routines and a greater range of actions. Hardcore Lara devotees will simply savour the opportunity to see their heroine in a number of fetching outfits, like the 'Matrix'-style catsuit

Mafia: The City Of Lost Heaven

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Take2/Talonsoft**
Developer: **Illusion Softworks**
Origin: **Czech Republic**
Release: **2001**

A mafioso turns state's evidence on the family, leading gamers through a crime-riddled '30s US city in Illusion Softworks' free-roaming and realistic action adventure title

In addition to the oneplayer game, which promises to combine a strong narrative and a high degree of historical authenticity with driving action, and the freedom to explore the city on foot, there are several multiplayer modes. Deathmatch, Last Man Standing and Capture The Flag are all present, along with races that take place over various routes within the city or on a race track outside the town

Although the game engine has recently undergone a major upheaval, making it extremely difficult to show *Mafia: The City Of Lost Heaven* in its full glory, the title nevertheless promises to be worthy of your attention in a variety of ways.

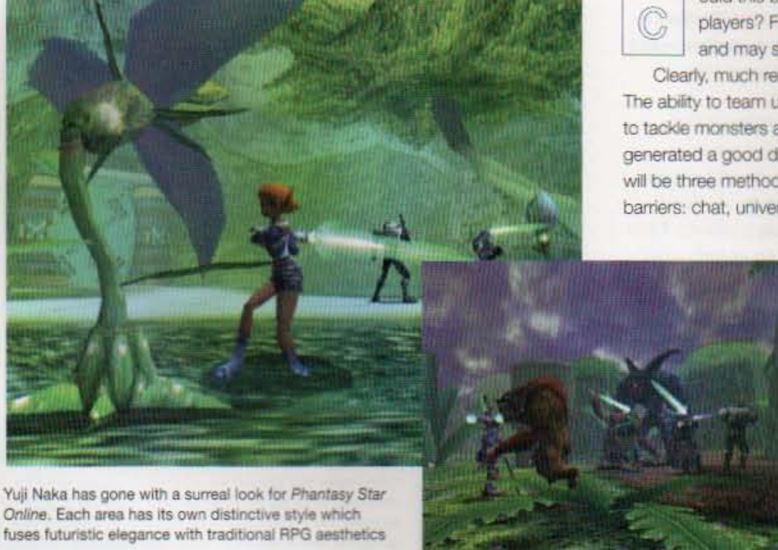
Lost Heaven is a fictional city that covers more than 12 square miles, but the game is set to be strong on realism. Architecture is based on actual buildings from the '30s, and real vehicles, such as the Model T and Roadster, feature alongside real Smith & Wessons and other lifelike weaponry, including baseball bats and sawn-off shotguns. Players will be granted licence to travel around the city on foot, by car, or even by public transport, and the game includes the capability to explore some 30 mission-specific buildings.

Although the title has a level-based structure, the overarching premise is that the lead character is recounting his story to a cop in a supergrass-style confession, in the hope of saving his skin from his previous employers, the Salieri crime family. There promises to be a strong degree of continuity between levels as well; should players run into pedestrians or crash red lights, the cops will remember in later levels. Within the confines of each mission there promises to be a multitude of ways to fulfil objectives.

Phantasy Star Online

Format: Dreamca
Publisher: Seg
Developer: Sonic Tea
Origin: Japa
Release: December 200

If Sega's flagship Internet title is anything to go by, the company should enjoy a merry Christmas, although whether it will be enough to ensure a happy new year is debatable



Yuji Naka has gone with a surreal look for *Phantasy Star Online*. Each area has its own distinctive style which fuses futuristic elegance with traditional RPG aesthetics

Could this be Sega's last Christmas as one of the major league players? For many, Sega's end-of-year line-up promises much and may see the company enjoy some seasonal merriment.

Clearly, much rests on flagship Internet title *Phantasy Star Online*. The ability to team up with three other people from across the globe to tackle monsters and plunder dungeons in a fantastical setting has generated a good deal of anticipation. It has been confirmed that there will be three methods of communication to overcome any language barriers: chat, universally recognised icons and determined words.

Improvements since **Edge** last looked at the title (**E**84) include more detailed textures, subtler shadow effects and polished transparency effects. Magical powers, referred to as technics, have also emerged to give players extra offensive capabilities. Monsters are more numerous, while the addition of flying opponents delivers further gameplay possibilities.

It could all be too little too late, however, and Sega must be wondering if its online gambit is merely a match struck in the gloom to guide others down their path.

Startopia

Format: PC
Publisher: Eido
Developer: Mucky Foo
Origin: UK
Release: November 200

Mucky Foot invites you to make a happy home among the stars for passing ETs before putting them to work and training them up to risk their lives on your behalf

Mucky Foot's heady mix of resource management and alien diplomacy continues to look compelling. Many elements of the game will be familiar to fans of *Theme* titles and other god sims, but the unique setting of *Startopia* is being used to include a host of new gameplay dynamics.

The game is set over a series of torus-shaped spacestations, each consisting of three decks and further broken down into 16 sections. The player is set the task of tailoring these environments to attract passing extraterrestrials, and there are 40 facilities that can be constructed to this end. Contented aliens give off a form of abstract energy that performs much the same function as currency. Alternatively they can be given employment, to undertake research for example, in which case they no longer contribute to the energy pool.

Everything looks sumptuous and, alongside multiplayer games of up to four players, the oneplayer game offers both sandbox and mission-based play. The most intriguing, and potentially most rewarding, aspect of the game, is the need to balance elements of exploration, espionage, diplomacy, terraforming, meeting the needs of each alien race, and even the possibility of shaping the character of the spacestation's populace by altering the environment before moving on to the next station.

Each of the nine races in the game have their own needs and desires, but by adjusting the living space, players can alter the overall sentiment of the populace. Military operations would benefit from a belligerent population, for example, though this may have disadvantages for other aspects of station management, the obvious one being dealing with marauding thugs during peacetime

Red Faction

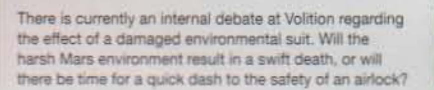
Format: **PC/PlayStation/Mac**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Volition**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4 2001**

Volition releases more information on its hugely promising firstperson shooter, with new weapons, vehicles and realtime effects introduced into the dynamic Geo-Mod engine

Although there was no new footage of oneplayer missions on offer, *Red Faction* continued to look impressive at ECTS, with more PS2-specific details emerging. Two new weapons were added to the handgun, sniper rifle and rocket launcher that were shown at E3, consisting of a remote charge and an assault rifle, and there were playable demos featuring more of the vehicles that will feature in the final game, including a submarine and a 'Total Recall'-style drilling vehicle.

Particle effects still look good, and a greenhouse demo showed off the realtime generation of glass shards in response to explosive charges and projectile weapons. Although both versions have common higher-level code, the PS2 incarnation will feature a custom-designed rendering engine, and benefits from a greater fill rate. Volition also claims to have implemented full-scene anti-aliasing.

The biggest challenge the team faces will be maintaining the freedom that the Geo-Mod engine offers, without curtailing the player's options through inadequate level design. Until the levels are shown, though, it's impossible to tell how successfully this title's immense potential has been realised.



There is currently an internal debate at Volition regarding the effect of a damaged environmental suit. Will the harsh Mars environment result in a swift death, or will there be time for a quick dash to the safety of an airlock?

The Bouncer

While the vast majority of the industry had consigned the scrolling beat 'em up to the genre graveyard, Square has been putting together a title that could revitalise it, and early response to its efforts has been very positive. Edge talks to the team close to pulling off a famous coup

When consoles made the leap from 16 to 32bit, many game genres thrived, but the scrolling slugfests so prevalent in the late '80s and early '90s never quite successfully made the transition. Several developers tried to breathe new life into the beat 'em up in 3D, with *Fighting Force* being the perfect example of the more mediocre attempts. Yet in a period when *Tekken* and *Tomb Raider* were king, 32bit scrolling brawlers felt like watered-down, compromised combinations of the prevailing genres – too weak in adventure and featuring monotonous, lacklustre fighting.

However, games are now entering a new era, powered by stupidly potent graphics chips and Emotion Engines. Once again, the old order has been turned on its head, so is now the time for Square to bring a new dynamic to the dying scrolling beat 'em up genre? The approach it has adopted is simple: build a game in 3D with never-before-seen levels of character detail, and drive the action with a compelling story interspersed with the kinds of effects seen in a big-budget action movie.

Sounds great – but *The Bouncer's* plot certainly isn't new. "Basically the story is 'go save the princess,'" explains Square's localisation specialist, **Nobby Matsuo**. "She's kidnapped for unknown reasons by this big corporation, and then these three guys have to go in and save her. As they go in to save her, they run into a lot of situations that shed light on why they want her and why she's so important to this corporation."

The guest list

The game is set in the near future, where its main character, Sion, works as a bouncer at a bar called Fate. When one of the bar's favourite patrons, Dominique, is abducted by agents of the Mikado corporation, Sion and his two fellow doormen, Volt and Kou, join forces to save her. While rescue missions like this one have been the impetus for almost every scrolling beat 'em up we've seen, the similarities end there.

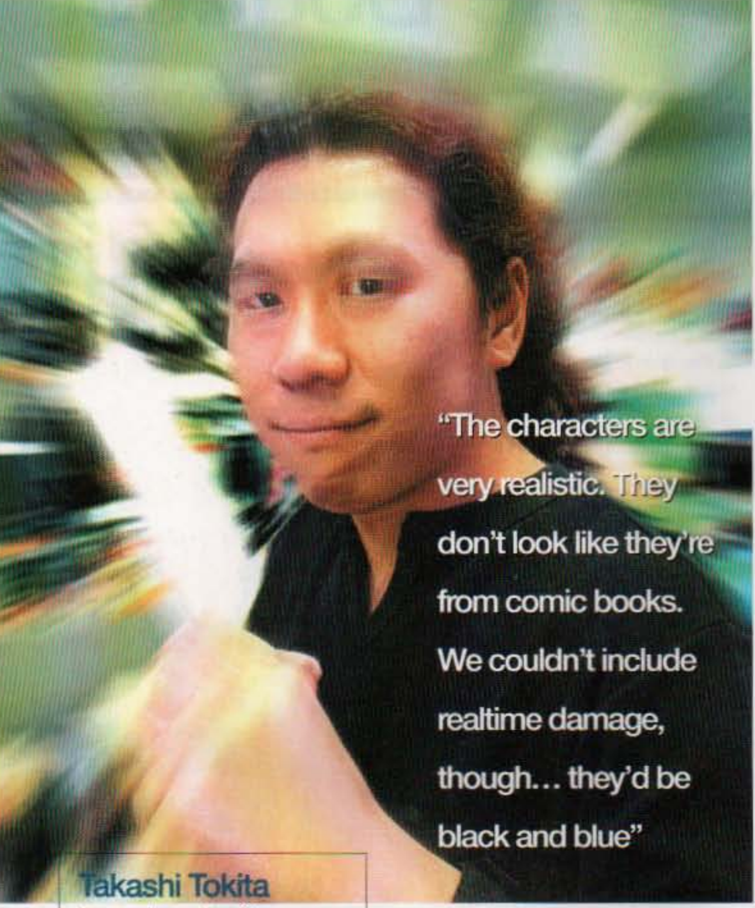
As the three characters desperately make their way through the urban jungle and into the Mikado headquarters, the obstacles they encounter – coupled with the detail in the surrounding environments – leave you with an impression of *The Bouncer* more reminiscent of 1979 gangland film 'The Warriors' than *Streets of Rage* on Mega Drive.

"You start at the bar," Matsuo-san says of the player's journey, "and you go to the train station. You also have a train battle, and the rest pretty much takes place within the Mikado

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Square**
Developer: **In-house**
Release: **December (US) TBC (UK)**
Origin: **Japan**

"The story is 'go save the princess'. She's kidnapped for unknown reasons by this unknown corporation, and then these three guys have to go in and save her"

The evil Mugetsu (right) holds Dominique captive, and it's up to bouncers Sion, Volt and Kou (far right) to liberate her



"The characters are very realistic. They don't look like they're from comic books. We couldn't include realtime damage, though... they'd be black and blue"

Takashi Tokita

It was only a matter of time before the spotlight shined on someone at Square other than the distinguished creator of *Final Fantasy*, Hironobu Sakaguchi – although it's not surprising that *The Bouncer* producer Takashi Tokita-san worked under the guidance of Sakaguchi on the original *Final Fantasy*. Tokita started at Square in 1986 as a part-time graphic designer and joined full-time in 1990, after which he held director positions on some of Square's finest titles, including but not limited to *Final Fantasy IV*, *Chrono Trigger*, *Final Fantasy VII* and *Parasite Eve*. And, as is obvious to any *Final Fantasy* fan, *The Bouncer* features the company's most recognised character designer, Tetsuya Nomura, who is best known for his stunning character design in *Final Fantasy VII* and *Final Fantasy VIII*.

corporation, and within the corporation there are areas such as labs and warehouses."

During the course of the game – which consists of a total of nine stages – players will face off against numerous enemies built from 12 different model types, and not every adversary will be of this world. "You'll run into non-human elements," Matsuo-san says, "not just organic or bionically enhanced, but robotic."

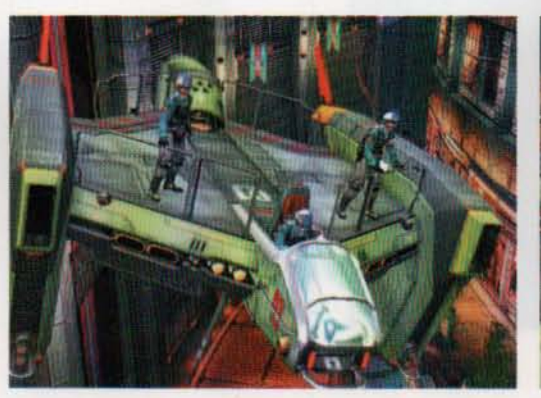
Ultimately, players will confront boss characters, including the kidnapper Mugetsu and Mikado's devilishly sexy Echidna. But players will confront other NPCs too, including the person who taught Sion martial arts. Yet if you've already assumed that *The Bouncer* features a cooperative multiplayer mode, you'd be completely wrong. The game offers a Versus mode, but its Story mode has been designed as a oneplayer experience. Before each battle in the Story mode, you select one of three heroes, while the AI takes control of the other two and assists you.

According to Square, different paths in the Story mode will unlock different characters, which goes the same for the Versus mode. The game's producer, **Takashi Tokita**, revealed at E3 that he doesn't think the Story mode will take too long to play through, but offers replay value through the multiple paths, and, depending on how well players do, they can receive any of several endings. Also, the game enables players to customise their characters, and at certain points they'll be able to choose special moves.

To give you an idea of the kind of performance Square has extracted from PlayStation2, Tokita-san reveals that Sion's gameplay model consists of approximately 3,000 triangles, but his high-poly cut-scene model consists of 6,700 triangles, of which 1,700 triangles form his face.

Access all areas

In the same way that *Tekken Tag*



Tournament freed characters from their z-axis bonds, the three main characters move freely through spacious 3D environments, unleashing numerous fighting moves on Mikado forces. Most of the demo shown at E3 was set in the game's opening bar room, where neon signs and a very realistic-looking Wurlitzer jukebox cast a warm glow to create a gorgeous realtime atmosphere. Other visual effects include depth-of-field camera work and motion blur on the characters. Yet this almost goes unnoticed with all the action in the foreground, with as many as seven highly detailed, smooth-skinned characters fighting onscreen simultaneously with no slowdown.

The genuine article

"These characters are very realistic," says Tokita-san. "They don't look like characters from comic books. We want to avoid cartoon-like movements as seen in *Dragonball*. If we gave them a movement where a fireball is shot from their mouth, that wouldn't work.

"We couldn't include realtime damage modelling on the characters, though. If we did, their bodies would be black and blue."

This short clip of combat inspired a number of other questions. How does the blocking system work? Can the characters use weapons? Tokita-san declined to answer, possibly because the gameplay was only just coming into place. Until recently the team has been focused on developing the characters and cut-scenes first. The designers believe that by creating a life for these characters first, they'll then be better suited to build unique gameplay that reflects personalities.

Overall, Square's production process for *The Bouncer* is more akin to the way Disney creates its animated films than traditional game development. Square started the process by recording the voiceover and videotaping the voice actors to assist their team when it came time to animate the facial expressions in the models – which is something Disney has done for years.

"The voiceovers are also very important to us," says Square product manager **Kenji Mimura**, "because this is the first PlayStation2 game that will have full voiceover over CG-animated movie footage."

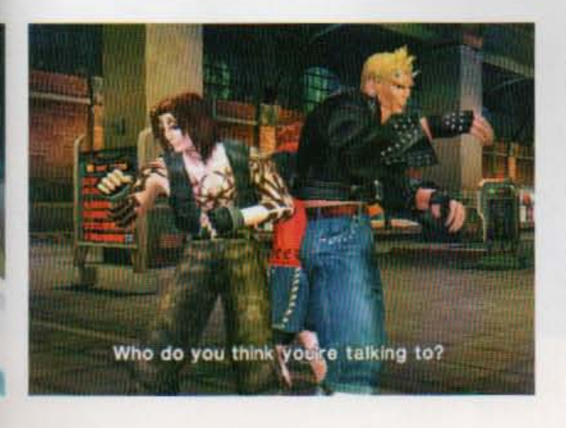
The game features an impressive CG-rendered intro, and throughout the game the player will be treated to full dialogue with numerous in-game cut-scenes. The voice work was actually done in English first, by Zero Limit in Japan (which was also responsible for the English versions of the anime films 'Ninja Scroll' and 'Ghost In The Shell'). To get the cast for *The Bouncer* right, the team listened to more than 200 tapes and ultimately decided on 12 main character voices, although if you include the minor characters, the total is more than 20. The intention is that Square will weave the cinematic story through the gameplay, revealing more and more as the action unfolds.

"Whatever character you use the most," says Matsuo-san, "you'll get the most details on. With Sion, you'll learn he has a dark past. He loses his girlfriend in an accident, which causes him to be more introverted. You'll learn about the death of his girlfriend and how that actually ties into the story."

Tying a cinematic story to a fighting game isn't an easy task. The question remains: how will audiences respond, and, do fighting games retain a sufficient fan base in Japan to justify taking what must be viewed as a gamble with *The Bouncer*?

"*Street Fighter II*, *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken* were all popular in Japan at one time," says Tokita-san. "But without a revolutionary system, they are a dying breed. In *The Bouncer*, with the 3D system, a new fighting action element can be enjoyed."

Whether or not the game is a success, Square is to be commended for its new take on the production process. Should it successfully breathe new life into this stalled genre, *The Bouncer* could become a hot ticket on PlayStation2.



It remains to be seen just how interactive the environments will be, but Square has confirmed that you can use the other characters to launch a combined attack. One thing seems clear, however, and that's the high quality of the character models, which matches anything seen in *Tekken Tag*

Return To Castle Wolfenstein

The time has come to rejoin the battle against the old enemy and take to the catacombs beneath a celebrated European chateau. Edge reports on activity all along the Activision front as the publisher readies the return one of videogaming's most celebrated titles

The title carries too many memories, and memories bring preconceptions, so drop them. This is just another PC game, it's a firstperson shooter based on the *Quake III* engine, and the action begins on a beach.

No. It begins with a boat, and the boat cuts through the smoke on the water to land on the beach. Then, as the shells rain down and the gunfire slices around you, and your friends start dying, you run for cover and return fire. All around you the battle rages: there's a mortar emplacement 20 yards in front of you, and the German operator lies dead by it, but there's a sniper up in the castle covering it. Besides, every time you form a plan, it changes because your eyes catch another comrade under fire and you yearn to keep him alive.

It's 1944, and William J Blaskowitz is part of a rapidly disintegrating platoon of GIs fighting their way up a beach, into a fortress, and towards the ENIGMA machine so desired by the allies. Soon, he'll find himself sucked into a 'Join us or we'll have to kill you' secret division of the armed forces, combating zombies, mutants, and Himmler's genetically engineered super-Nazis. For now, though, he's just another GI, following your tapped-out orders as you send him weaving through the smoke-filled trenches.

Skeletons languish in the catacombs. It's not the first time they've appeared in Castle Wolfenstein, but now they're in full 3D

Taking E3 by storm

Return To Castle Wolfenstein took E3 thanks to a simple gunfire-fight-on-cable-car routine and the nostalgia of hundreds of games journalists. Now, at Activate – Activision's pre-ECTS showing – there's much more for developer Gray Matter Interactive to show. There's also more reason to be hopeful *Wolfenstein 3D*'s sequel will create the same stir and excitement the original did back in 1991, because even on the most superficial level the initial beach-storming sequence is wonderful. It's all the more impressive when you realise none of the explosive

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Gray Matter**
Release: **2001**
Origin: **US**

Return to Castle Wolfenstein took E3 thanks to a simple gunfight-on-cable-car routine and the nostalgia of hundreds of videogame journalists

A guard lies dead inside the castle. *Wolfenstein 3D*'s bitmapped bodies are a far cry from these polygon models. They don't disappear, either – unless you pick them up and hide them in a more subtle location

It all started when...

Castle Wolfenstein was released on the Apple][in 1981. Fans had to wait ten years for id to buy the licence for a sequel: the revolutionary *Wolfenstein 3D*. Released as shareware by Apogee (the first episode was free, but the remaining five were mail order-only), *Wolfenstein 3D* required a 286, and squeezed on to 2.4Mb of hard-disk space. With its success came the first online mod fervour; within weeks, episode and character editors were released so anyone with the full version could create patches to modify the game to their own ends. Conversions were inevitable, and eventually a Super Nintendo version was released where blood was changed to sweat and the guard dogs changed to rats.

events are pre-scripted but all borne from the enemy and ally AI.

Though still only partially complete, the intelligence demonstrated by the computer-controlled characters is astonishing. Later in the afternoon, **Edge** is shown a sequence where Blaskowitz rounds a street corner to find a squad of Nazi troopers marching in drill formation straight towards him. A guard spots him and yells out, causing his comrades to break rank and begin firing upon the player. Just like the introductory beach sequence, none of the action is scripted. The guards are just obeying their complex behaviour patterns, but still the action plays out like a precisely timed, impeccably orchestrated set piece. It's not. It's just the game, following its own rules.

Military precision

For a game whose principles are based on comic-book wartime adventure rather than factual recreation, a surprising level of historical attention to detail is included. The castle architecture has been constructed around floor plans of genuine European castles, and high-resolution textures pave their complex polygon surfaces. Many are composed from digital photographs of stone, brick and wood taken in France and Germany, and a large proportion of the posters and ephemera that litter the Nazi hallways are either digitised from or based upon genuine wartime artefacts. The guards' uniforms are intricately woven bitmap recreations of the real thing; character definition doesn't drop when the setting becomes more fantastical, either, with the zombie models being detailed enough to let the player see right through holes in their torn flesh.

Weapons, too, are initially composed of accurately modelled '40s weaponry and carry a crunching metallic realism. Later, they warp into a slighter version of the game's zombie-fuelled cartoon fantasy madness, being secret prototypes from top-secret German laboratories. Grenades have been implemented using a five-second fuse system, but they must be both well-aimed and well-timed. If they're not, the smart enemy AI means they're perfectly capable of picking them up and throwing them right back at the player. Equally impressive is the flamethrower, from which those enemies without fire-retardant clothing will wisely flee, and the sight of the original's chaingun rendered 3D in all its lead-spitting fury. The current FPS vogue for pinpoint accuracy via sniper combat is well representedm too: at one point during the play-through **Edge** witnesses a sniper rifle being used to shoot a the tin hat clean from a distant soldier's head.

As well as the eponymous Castle Wolfenstein, levels see Blaskowitz fighting his way through – among other locations – crypts, laboratories, and military installations. The near-abandoned village in the shadow of Himmler's über-Nazi experimentation is the most striking that has been revealed to date, being a ghost town where the silence is only broken by distant crying and the sound of marching troops. Locked doors and boarded windows visually mark the landscape, but their inaccessibility belies one of the points Gray Matter is keen to stress.

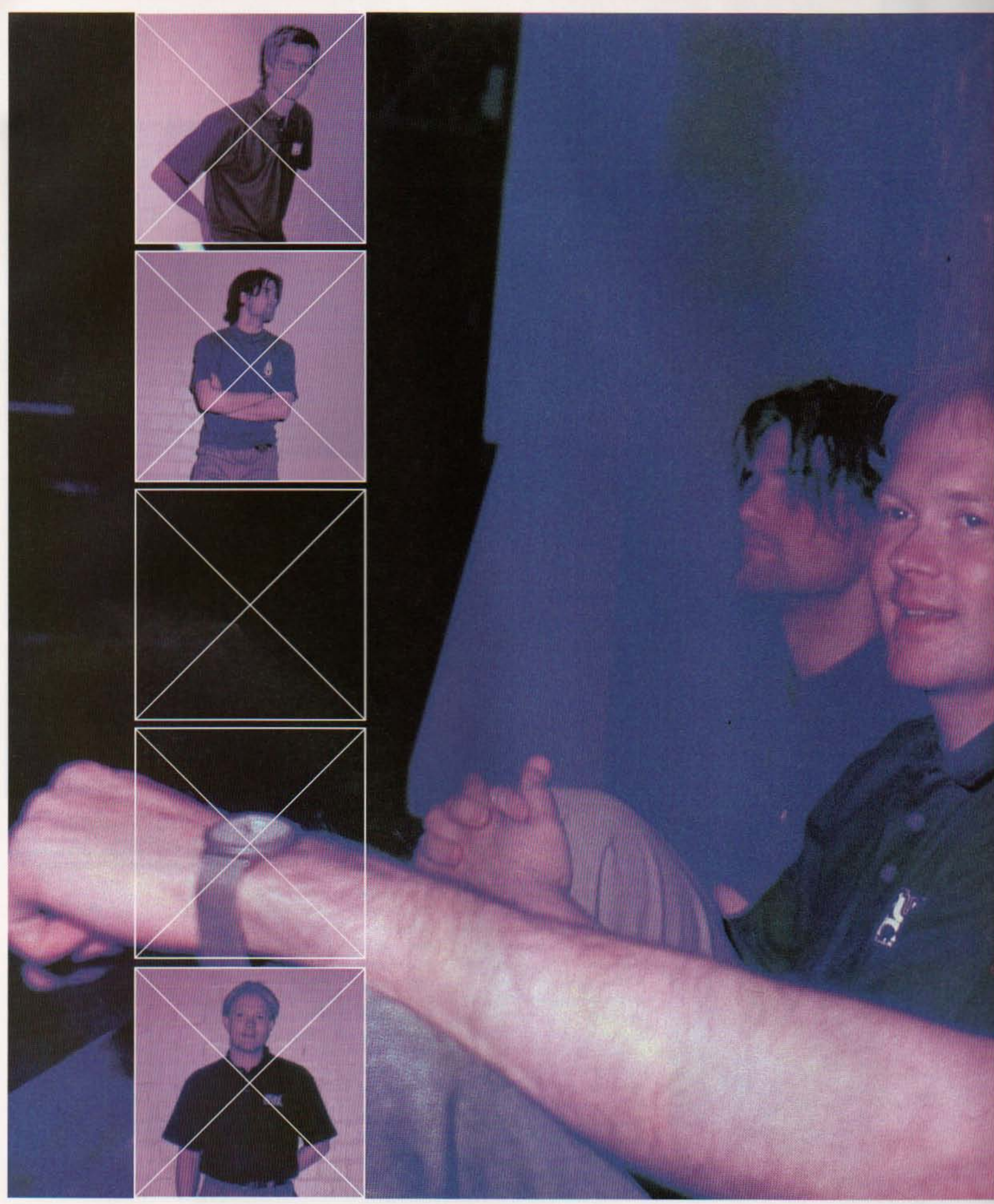
The shopfronts and houses aren't just a bitmapped façade, but genuine three-dimensional structures which, theoretically at least, can be explored as anywhere else in the game. Theoretically, because entering them won't be easy; though visits to some of their rooms will be the key to level progression, others play to the *Wolfenstein 3D* secret-room tradition. Diligent searching may lead to an entrance and predictably satisfying rewards, not just in standard ammo, armour and weaponry power-ups, but in strategic rooftop positions and storyline-enriching contacts with the local resistance.

Frantic fighting

Despite the importance of exploration, the game isn't destined to be a cerebral classic. Puzzles will be limited to the primitive lever-and-door type, replacing the colour-coded keys from the first game. And, though stealth will be encouraged at points and the sniper rifle will doubtless please those who favour a single-shot combat dynamic, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is primarily an arcade combat game. If that disappoints you, though, then Gray Matter believes you're missing the point.

Like the imminent *TimeSplitters* on PS2, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is another sign the FPS is being divided into two broad categories: those which value realism and careful planning, and those where the thrill is provided by non-stop kinetic action and destruction. For the game to retain the power and energy of *Wolfenstein 3D* – for it to be really called a sequel – it has to be completely committed to the 'arcade' side. Besides, how do you plan for an enemy mortar decimating your friends the moment you hit the shore? Plans come during the action, on instinct: you spend five minutes sprinting for the castle under covering fire, ten dodging the flesh-tearing shrapnel, 20 locked in a multiplayer trench battle on the grey and yellow beach. It's part terror, part exhilaration, but always adrenaline – and it looks like being a worthy sequel to a game that, ten years ago, introduced those same words to the genre.

The cable-car sequence wowed audiences at this year's E3. Blaskowitz has to make his way up the mountain, under torrents of Nazi fire. For a better vantage point, our hero can climb outside and on to the top of the car



Photography: Martin Thompson

Inside…

Funcom

The Online Anarchists from Oslo talk to Edge about their company's comprehensive Internet strategy, which accommodates everything from massively multiplayer persistent worlds to games of cards

At the same time as the **Edge Live** panel discussed such issues as the accessibility of gameplay, the relevance of orcs and goblins, and the online future of gaming, over at ECTS the bustle continued at the *Anarchy Online* stand. The constant commotion and the huge response to the game's beta testing is a testament to the persistent popularity of the arcane intricacies of the massively multiplayer online roleplaying game. While the game doesn't ostensibly feature any elves or dragons, the races that are featured are only a small conceptual step away.

Sega, Sony and Microsoft may continue to talk about the online capabilities of their respective consoles, but as the strategy of Funcom demonstrates, online gaming has matured immensely on the PC. Since setting up shop in Oslo back in 1993 with just five employees, and adding an office in Dublin the following year, Funcom has seen traditional console and PC development give way to a network-centric focus. Since 1997 the company has made versions of hearts, backgammon and poker available on its Web site, but with the imminent release of *No Escape* – a multiplayer action title that falls between the immersive complexity of *Anarchy Online* and the immediate accessibility of the simpler titles – the company will soon have the whole gamut of gaming audiences catered for.

Producer **Tommy Strand**, *Anarchy Online*'s lead programmer **Martin Amor** and company president **Andre Backen** took time out from their hectic ECTS schedule to speak to **Edge** about the immense potential of their persistent sci-fi world. Set 28,000 years in the future on a planet called Rubi-Ka (derived from the Latin for red and dry), the game pits a terraforming mega corporation called Omni-Tek against egalitarian rebel tribes who seek to undermine its grip on the planet's resources. So far, so 'Star Wars' or 'Lord of the Rings', so what is it about *Anarchy Online* that has attracted so much interest?

Tommy Strand
producer
Andre Backen
president
Martin Amor
lead programmer

As with every element of *Anarchy Online*, Funcom has attempted to make weather effects as seamless as possible so that they add to, rather than detract from, the sense of being in a virtual world and community

Players can buy an evening dress or tuxedo before going out in the evening. Amor: "We're focused on the social environment"

Despite the fact it has yet to be released, there is already a significant online community devoted to *Anarchy*, and the company has been inundated with prospective beta testers. "The first phase went beyond our expectations," reveals Amor. "Of course, now that we have 600 beta testers, they do discover some bugs in the game, but that's why we did it. We got feedback on the interface, we got feedback on the huge worlds – people wanted to buy maps but that functionality will be enabled later, so they got lost in the world – and the character creation set-up will probably change in the final version, as we got some valuable feedback."

Building a community

The most significant reason for such a high level of expectation is the importance that has been attached from the outset to the creation of a complex, fully functioning virtual society in which player choice is fundamental. Whereas *Ultima Online* and *Everquest* achieved such a thing largely by accident, the measures taken by Funcom to maximise the unique advantages of an online world are almost unprecedented. "In *Ultima Online* players managed to put on a whole Shakespeare play using only the two moves – greet and bow" explains Strand. To assist such spontaneous creativity, *Anarchy* will include a host of gestures. "We have everything from the simple greeting, to more advanced movements, like 'Pulp Fiction'-style dancing. This way, the players can express their behaviour." Although there will be discos in the larger cities, plans to have a live performance have yet to be finalised, as Amor makes clear: "We have a rock band emailing and calling us asking to play live and broadcast it on MTV. This is possible with *Anarchy*, but we're still in discussions – there are marketing issues." And for those who fancy the idea of cutting a sartorial swathe in such a virtual dance hall, Amor has more good news in the shape of clothing that has no gameplay function. Players can buy an evening dress or tuxedo, for example, before going out in the evening. "We're focused on the social environment, so people feel that it's a living, breathing world."

Similar lengths have been taken to ensure that design elements don't shatter this illusion. Each player will be given an apartment in the game, where they can invite fellow players, and which can be upgraded to a larger size, or with better equipment, for a spot of conspicuous consumption. Likewise, a nifty solution has been found to the problem that players face in a game like *Everquest*, in which bodies can be looted. Players can take out insurance on their life and items. "Life insurance is actually the way you save your character, so you save the cell structure of your character by going to a medical facility and going into a storage

The world in which *Anarchy Online* is set, Rubi-Ka, is a huge environment. During beta testing, some players have found it difficult to navigate without a map, but this hasn't stopped one or two individuals from trying to exploit regional economic differences for profit, and there is always public transport. The landscapes have all been designed by Funcom's art department, which is proud of the textural diversity it has incorporated

Choose your own path

As with any good RPG, players can choose from an abundance of races and careers. *Anarchy Online* offers a range of humanoid breeds that are the result of Omni-Tek's experiments into genetic modification and nanotechnology. Homo Solitus is a generically improved human, with an all-round set of skills, while the immense strength of Homo Atrox is offset by below-average agility and intelligence, and Homo Opifex has cunning and guile in spades. Homo Nano is a nanotechnology master, which has developed to such an advanced state that it is similar to magic. Likewise, the range of professions on offer reflects the developer's emphasis on choice. The fixer operates on the margins of society. The soldier, agent and doctor are all self explanatory, as is the martial artist, whose emphasis on spirituality is at the expense of an affinity for technology. In contrast, engineers are specialised in electronics. Adventurers shun city life for exploring the wilderness of Rubi-Ka. Potentially the most interesting vocation, however, is the bureaucrat, who has to deal with political infighting through the manipulation of others, such as the enforcer – a thuggish streetfighter. Nanotechnicians and meta-physicists both use of nanotechnology to their advantage, and finally, traders are those who seek personal enrichment. One such opportunist demonstrated the success that Funcom has had in establishing a viable alternative world, as Amor recounts: "There's a city at one end of Rubi-Ka where you can buy some pills, which you can't buy in Omni One, so he was buying lots of pills, and travelling all the way down to sell them to people. We already have our first online pusher."

chamber," clarifies Strand. "When you die, this is how you will be cloned. If you want to take little risk, you can save yourself between every easy mission. Or you can do really difficult missions and never save. It costs you money to save, so you could save your character, or you could get a really cool gun. Item insurance is a way to cut downtime of looking for your corpse. The more you pay, the shorter the time from your death to getting your items back."

Although player killing will not be allowed in Omni-Tek-controlled cities – which are connected by subway – outside the cities failed genetic experiments from Omni-Tek will be able to attack players, and, even further away, Omni-Tek players can clash with their rebel counterparts. Outside these areas there are mayhem zones, where anything goes.

Shaping your environment

With a storyline spanning four years already planned, players will have a very real chance to shape the outcome of an epic struggle, be it as an Omni-Tek bureaucrat assigning quests to fellow players, or as a trader assisting the rebels by providing cheap supplies. But, equally, there is the opportunity just to savour the online environment, as Strand is at pains to point out. "If you don't want to talk to people you don't have to, but if you want to, we'll give you all the tools and facilities that are needed to make an online community. What we're actually doing is creating unique content for a single individual, whenever, however and wherever you want it. By doing this we both encourage people to explore on their own and learn without people laughing at them because they got killed by an easy monster. For the first few levels, players don't have to talk to people, they can just go in, do their own thing, and when they feel comfortable about the game they can start meeting more people, joining groups, joining guilds, and eventually they'll be part of the social structure."

Although the figure has yet to be finalised, Amor thinks that the game will support up to 40,000 players, thanks to its automatic generation of content. This process has the added advantage of eliminating camping, since items are created dynamically and can be placed anywhere in the game world.

Although Funcom Dublin is now set to work with X-Box, there are currently no agreements in place to bring *Anarchy Online* to next-generation consoles. Though this may be disappointing for gamers that don't have access to a PC with online capabilities, it is even more of a disappointment for Strand: "*Anarchy* in everybody's living room, that's what I want."

For the rhythmically challenged, *Anarchy Online* presents the opportunity to retreat behind a comprehensive roster of social gestures, including dancing

FAQ

Company name: Funcom

Founded: 1993

HQ: Oslo, Norway and Dublin, Ireland

Number of employees: 130

Softography: *The Longest Journey* (PC), *Championship Motocross Featuring Ricky Carmichael* (PS), *Speed Freaks* (PS), *Deadly Skies* (PS), *Dragonheart* (PS)

Projects in development: *Anarchy Online* (PC), *No Escape* (PC), *CMX 2001* (PS), *Spellblade* (PC)

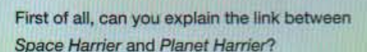
Welcome
the Fantasy

(back) to Zone

Back in 1985, an outrageous new coin-op burst on to the arcade scene. With mend-bending visuals, crazed, pumping musical accompaniment, and a hydraulic cabinet which threw around anyone brave enough to sample its warped sensibilities, *Space Harrier* became an immediate sensation. Now that Sega is bringing the legend back to life, **Edge** just had to find out how

CEO of Sega subsidiary Amusement Vision since July this year, **Toshihiro Nagoshi** clearly has something of a task on his hands in taking the *Space Harrier* legacy on board. But then his track record – which includes work on the likes of *Daytona USA*, *SCUD Race*, *Spike Out* and *Virtua Striker 2000* – speaks for itself, and there can be few other creatives who could be trusted with such a formidable enterprise.

Edge met up with Nagoshi-san at Amusement Vision's Tokyo HQ in order to see how work is progressing on rebuilding the Fantasy Zone...



As should be expected, the Hikari board generates some remarkable visuals, and has allowed Amusement Vision to create some especially extravagant bosses (main). Four characters exists for standard selection (top left), while an item shop reminiscent of *Fantasy Zone*'s allows players to beef up many elements

First of all, can you explain the link between *Space Harrier* and *Planet Harrier*?

Well, it's not so big. I started with the same concept – a 3D environment where a man is flying and shooting enemies – but that's about it. I decided to include 'Harrier' in the title to appeal to the fans. The world is very much the same in a sense that it is based on sci-fi themes, but, in the case of *Planet Harrier*, the gameworld is more realistic. As *Space Harrier* was at the time, *Planet Harrier* is quite an original title compared to the coin-ops you commonly see.

Why did you opt to make a 3D shooter?

I guess the decision was based on the fact that few people are making shooting games nowadays. Plus, I have wanted to make a game of this type for years now.

What are your sources of inspiration?

I loved *Space Harrier* and, as I said, I've wanted to make another title like it for a while. However, I didn't have any particular inspiration. When we decided to make *Slash Out* I divided our staff in two teams. One worked on *Slash Out*, and was mostly made up of people who worked on *Spike Out*. For the second team we had a meeting to decide what to do. We wanted, of course, to develop a great title, but from the beginning twoplayer gameplay was our main aim. We had a long brainstorming process from which it appeared that there were no 3D shooting games on the market, so we found the challenge interesting.

What's your target audience?

It seems there are currently only a few people who play 3D shooting games. Most of the arcade productions are directed towards driving, music and sports. With *Planet Harrier* I guess I wanted to show players that this kind of game also exists. I think it's important to have the choice among various kinds of games.

As for the target audience, I'm not aiming at *Space Harrier* fans very much. People who know about *Space Harrier* are now 30 years old. There are a lot of gamers who do not know about the game. Even in the *Planet Harrier* development team, many people had never seen the game. As a result, I would like to introduce this particular type of game to these new arcade users.

Doesn't the *Space Harrier* licence belong to AM2? Did this pose any problems?

Yes, to start with. This isn't something I can speak too much about. *Space Harrier* is, indeed, an AM2 licence, so Yu Suzuki and I 'talked' about it. He agreed to give me the licence, and *Planet Harrier* became possible.

Shooting and shopping

So how does the gameplay work?

It is quite simple. The player controls a character who is flying in the air. There is a crosshair to show what the player is targeting. The goal is to destroy the enemies.

When you destroy an enemy you earn money. The player collects this in order to purchase articles in a shopping area inside the game. He can enhance and customise his character in many ways (life, weaponry, etc), a part of the game that is very similar to *Fantasy Zone*. What I want to happen is for the player to remain focused on the action in the game and explore the environment.

Planet Harrier's environments are suitably otherworldly, but devotees of its precursor will no doubt mourn the loss of giant, garishly coloured mushroom-esque growths, among other elements, littering the scenery. Five stages exist in total, but they can be played through twice, changing in appearance on the second run – day turning to night, for example – which should ensure those coins keep dropping into the slot

Another boss encounter demonstrates the imagination that has gone into the game (top)

The cabinet we use for the game is Sega's standard twin driving cabinet. In terms of control, there is a joystick, of course, a start button, a lock-on button, a shoot button, and a communication button. Since we wanted the game to be based on twoplayer gameplay, we included a system that allows users to communicate with each other. If a player wants to join an ongoing game, he can ask the other player for his agreement to enter play. Users asked for this type of feature when I released *Spike Out*. It is also possible to exchange money during a twoplayer game in order to allow both players to equip while shopping.

I also decided to include the possibility for both players to blend their characters together onscreen. When both heroes are linked, they recover lifeforce. I thought a long time about

"People who know about *Space Harrier* are now around 30 years old. Even in the *Planet Harrier* development team, many people had never seen the original game"

Though at first sight *Planet Harrier* looks like a polygonised update of the original, there's more to it than that – the lock-on system, for example, is a major gameplay feature, behaving much like that of the *Panzer Dragoon* series. Hopefully this element will not dumb down the game to the point of spoiling it

The original coin-op in all its hydraulic-driven glory (above), and its sprite-scaling beauty (right)

this feature in order to settle on what would be fun. The obvious thing was to give the new character a huge power-up. However, this wasn't very enjoyable in practice. I also thought it could be cool to allow a shield option, but once again, it didn't turn out to be that fun. Eventually I decided to allow the characters to recover life. Since they have to avoid enemy fire while they do this, it requires good teamplay from both players.

The opportunity to link is proposed to the players when their characters are close to each other. A sign appears, and if the players opt to link, a forcefield will form between the heroes. To stop the process, players have only to move in opposite directions.

How many stages are in the game?

There are five stages, but there is a loop system I cannot detail too much yet. But, basically, it will be possible to clear a same area twice. The second time, the stage changes: the time of day is different and the enemy level is harder. Each stage end is guarded by a boss, and using our long experience designing bosses, we came up with some quite original and challenging ones. I won't describe them, as I want to surprise players, but they're special.

Hidden and dangerous

What are the *Planet Harrier* characters like?

There are four of them, and their differences lie in the balance of their abilities. More firepower but less stamina, faster missiles, etc. While characters' balances are different, they will basically perform the same actions. As well as the four, there are hidden characters. Unfortunately, Space Harrier is not one of them. However, I spoke with the other Sega companies and I can reveal that Opa-Opa (from *Fantasy Zone*) is included. I designed the program especially to include this character, and we even remixed the background music score to accommodate him.

How does the lock-on system work?

In *Space Harrier*, you just shoot, but *Planet Harrier* is closer to *Panzer Dragoon*, which I think is fantastic. In fact, my initial intention was to make a *Panzer Dragoon*-type game

Players are no longer felled by a single hit, as was the case in the original game, but have a form of life meter. This is just one feature that can be upgraded by visiting the item shops that litter the levels

"I really believe that we, at Sega, have the very best game programming technological knowhow in the world. We are able to include friendly gameplay and high technology together"

for the arcade, but I rapidly saw that wouldn't deliver the same fun it does in the home. As far as the lock-on system goes, I tried many games to come out with the best system.

The game will display a maximum of 16 enemies at any one time and the number of enemies is set for each part of the game. The lock-on system is enabled with the press of a button. A lock-on gauge at the top of the screen indicates the number of enemies you can target at the same time, and when the game starts you can target the maximum number of enemies. According to the enemy type, it will take up more or less of the lock-on gauge. Players can lock-on to enemies up until the gauge is full, when he can release the lock-on button and missiles are launched.

While I find current arcade games quite difficult and very manic, the solution isn't to make easy or simple titles – in the field of 3D shooting games, I don't think people would appreciate to finish a game too easily – so *Planet Harrier* will be quite a challenge. In fact, it is only recently that anyone on the team managed to clear the game with one credit.

A shifting focus

Do you think Sega will continue to concentrate on casual gamers and network titles, rather than the hardcore market?

I think this may be the main problem for Sega at the moment. I guess the shift in focus may be as a result of most of the teams not understanding what a Sega game is any more. Listening to gamers, some would say that a

Although not shown here, one of game's most enticing components is its twoplayer link-up feature. Nagoshi-san and his team toyed with many types of effect this would have on gameplay before eventually settling on using it to replenish energy. Linked up and not being able to fire, players will simply have to dodge

Sega game is based on very friendly gameplay. Others would say the trademark is the high degree of technology introduced in the game.

I would say both. Titles like *Virtua Fighter* are a good example. I really believe that we, at Sega, have the very best game programming technological knowhow in the world. We are able to include friendly gameplay and high technology in the same project.

In the last years, the marketing strategy has changed – that side of the business became too important – and maybe we haven't come up with games. We have to rethink our approach and deliver what we do best – great games. The videogame industry is about games. If you lose sight of this fundamental concept, problems will arise. Marketing should not direct game design.

A vision of the future

So what's next for Amusement Vision?

I can say that we will continue to produce fighting games, and I would like to see us release a title a year. But since I would like to explore many ways of doing fighting games, we may launch a different title each year, and not produce a continuous series, such as *Virtua Fighter*. We are working on a fighting game project at the moment, as it happens.

We will also continue the *Virtua Striker* series. The third episode is on its way at this moment, and we will announce it at the JAMMA Show. *Planet Harrier* will also be there, and we will announce *Daytona USA* for Dreamcast – this is still a temporary name, as there is problem with the licence (see *NASCAR* box). We have added a number of game modes, there are eight tracks, and it is possible to customise many aspects of the game. The development has been very fast, since the project only started in January.

The game is based on the first *Daytona* on Model 2. Importing the original source code from Model 2 was a challenge, but the other

Running the red triangle over opponents activates the lock-on mechanism. A total of 16 enemies can be targeted simultaneously and, with a fully loaded lock-on guage, dispensed with in dramatic fashion

Boarding up

First used in the *Star Wars Racer* coin-op, the Hikaru board seems to be in its final throes. It has often been described as the 'Model 3.5' by some outside Sega, but the company isn't keen to talk about Hikaru, which is a sophisticated double-CPU board. It's a piece of complex architecture, but much more expensive than the Naomi (above), and was codenamed 'SK-V'. Plus, as the first rumours circulate about the development of Naomi 2, codenamed 'Samurai', it is looking more likely Hikaru will lose its high-end slot to Naomi 2. The first Naomi 2 title is expected to be an AM2 production.

elements were quite straightforward. It is already 95 per cent complete, bar the network feature. It will not be based at Sega.com, as I don't find it efficient enough. I guess we will use the standard connection, but this is still to be decided. I really want to get my own servers.

I haven't worked on a console title for a very long time. This version of *Daytona* has been developed for the US, and then I will work on the Japanese version. I have already had some ideas for the Japanese port, and I would really would like the network to support eight players at the same time. It would be the very first time ever on a console.

However, as *Planet Harrier* is developed on the Hikaru board instead of the Naomi, any Dreamcast conversion would be very difficult to do, as the power levels vary a lot. Whatever happens, we will definitely strengthen our sport line-up. With the World Cup 2002 approaching, soccer titles will become increasingly important over the coming couple of years. *Virtua Striker* will be an important series.

Do you think that the 'standard' Sega game series are coming to an end?

Well, that depends on what each Sega company does now. Most of Sega's big series are in AM2's hands. Hit Maker has the most recent series, and Sega Rosso has *Sega Rally*. I believe it will not take too much time before sequels to famous series are announced. By that, I mean I expect announcements at the JAMMA Show, but I don't expect to see any code. We will see.

NASCAR Arcade

Sega Rosso, a companion division of Nagoshi-san's Amusement Vision, is behind *NASCAR Arcade*, which, at first glance, could be mistaken for an update of *Daytona USA*. However, it quickly becomes clear that the title has focused on absolute realism.

The game includes all the elements of the NASCAR formula, thanks to EA allowing Sega Rosso to use its licence for a coin-op-only title. The tracks are predominately oval – encouraging high speeds – and the racing is between European GT-style cars.

Three of the official championship courses are included, each of which represents a different level of difficulty: Tallageda Superspeedway (rookie, daylight, oval circuit); Richmond International Raceway (normal, night, oval circuit), Watkins Glen International (expert, daylight, classical circuit). A bonus circuit is included in the latter stages.

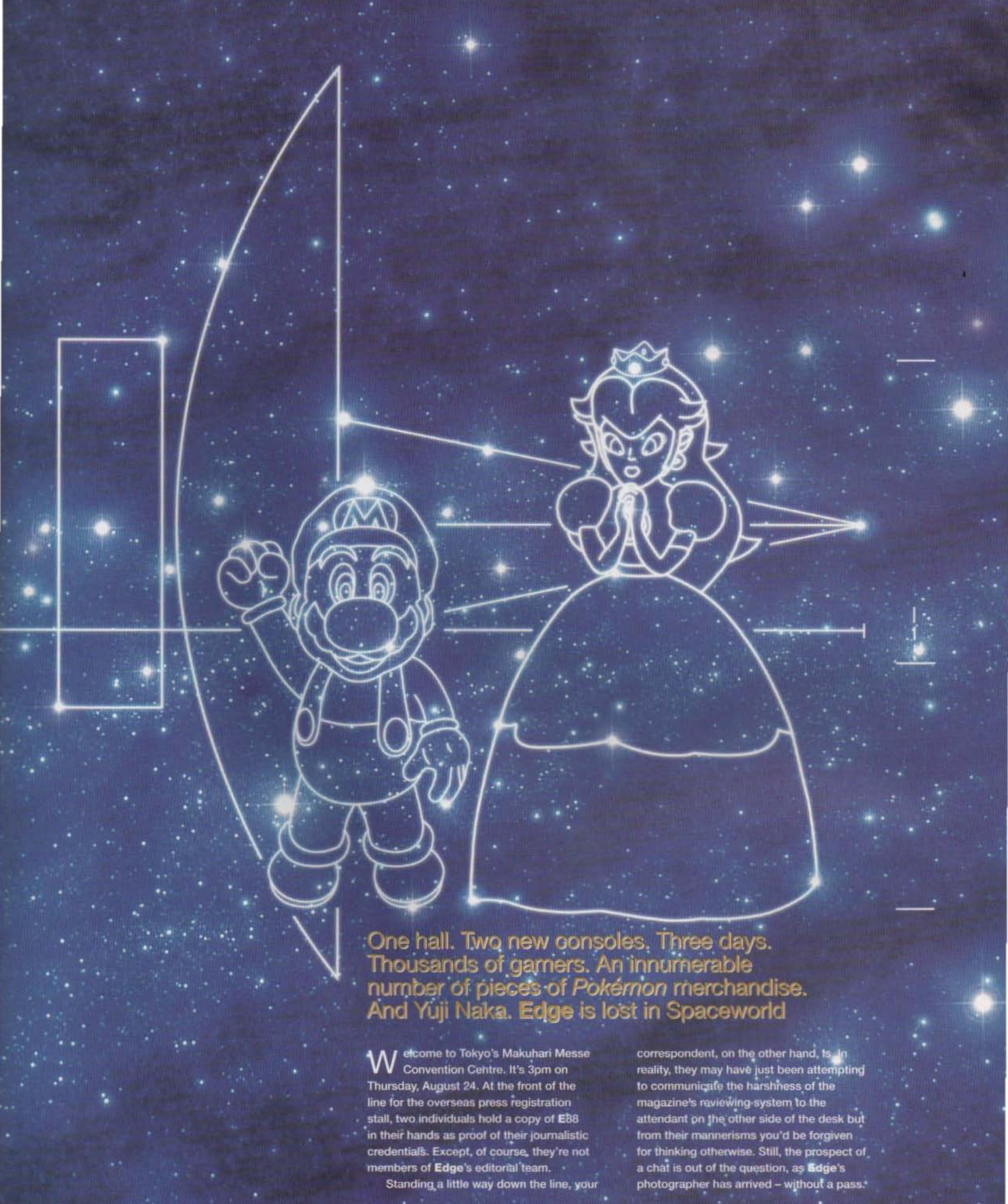
Oneplayer modes include Race and Time Attack, with a multiplayer Vs mode linking up to eight cabinets. The deluxe version of the cabinet reproduces the near-tubular interior of a NASCAR car.

The game is technically accomplished, with cars and background well rendered, but the gear shifting requires more attention and the graphics currently fall short of the high standards of *Sega Rally 2*.

The predominately oval tracks of the NASCAR series encourage high speeds and weaving through traffic, the combination of which can result in spectacular crashes and tight races

NASCAR Arcade offers three tracks from the official series – Tallageda Superspeedway, Richmond International Raceway and Watkins Glen International – together with a bonus track designed by Sega Rosso. Each of the circuits represents a different level of competition, ranging from novice to expert. Night races appear, too

2000
Nintendo Spaceworld



One hall. Two new consoles. Three days. Thousands of gamers. An innumerable number of pieces of *Pokémon* merchandise. And Yuji Naka. **Edge** is lost in Spaceworld

Welcome to Tokyo's Makuhari Messe Convention Centre. It's 3pm on Thursday, August 24. At the front of the line for the overseas press registration stall, two individuals hold a copy of **E**88 in their hands as proof of their journalistic credentials. Except, of course, they're not members of **Edge**'s editorial team.

Standing a little way down the line, your correspondent, on the other hand, is. In reality, they may have just been attempting to communicate the harshness of the magazine's reviewing system to the attendant on the other side of the desk but from their mannerisms you'd be forgiven for thinking otherwise. Still, the prospect of a chat is out of the question, as **Edge**'s photographer has arrived – without a pass.

The 'show' is due to begin in just under half an hour.

Day one: Spaceworld lifts off

Within a few frantic minutes a pass is obtained, the doors open and everyone makes it inside safely. Today, a day before Spaceworld officially opens, Nintendo is holding a conference to unveil its two new hardware units, Game Boy Advance and GameCube. With the exception of the 1,000-odd attendees negotiating the escalators, the hall (previously used by Sony for its PlayStation Festival 2000 last February) is eerily lifeless. To the right of the main stage the Game Boy Advance section (the largest of the event's five main areas) holds 150 GBA units all currently under wraps and guarded by Nintendo staff. **Edge** spots the *Mario Kart Advance* (working title) area and secures a seat strategically close to it.

The excitement is evident. Members of the world's media and assorted softco representatives are running around talking to acquaintances, pointing to various areas of the hall – at times the scene becomes remarkably reminiscent of what you'd imagine a school trip to Disneyland to feel like. But, ultimately, everyone takes their places and then the urgency of the previous moments is bluntly placed in perspective. As so often with so many things Nintendo, the world is made to wait.

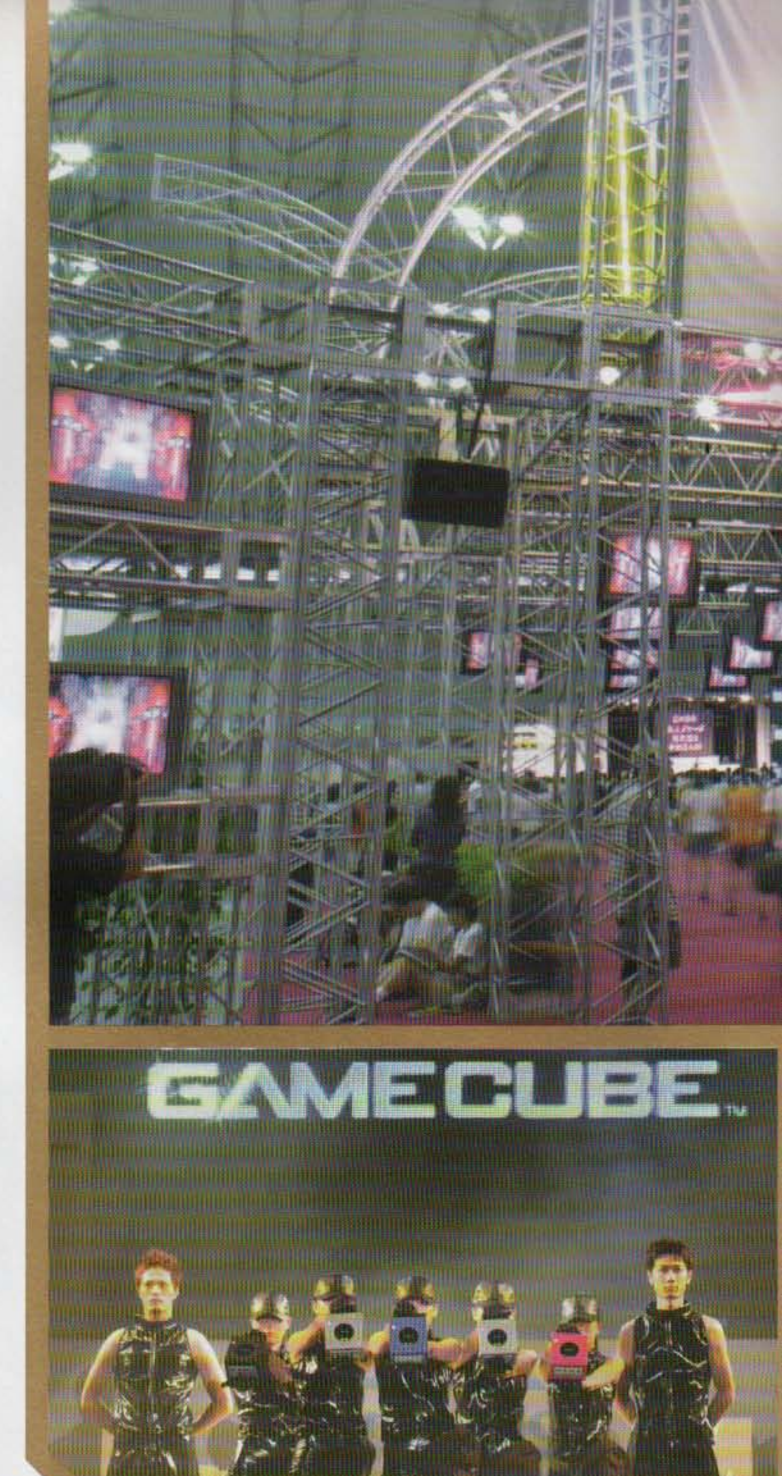
Eventually, executive vice president Atsushi Asura appears on stage to do his thing (you can read the lowdown of the actual announcement in last month's Frontend section). After a round of applause, dry ice, two new consoles and eight demos, it is a shock to see how surprised everyone is by how much Nintendo – a company known for its reticent approach to the videogame press – has shown today. And yet, in reality, everyone should realise that it has shown nothing. Of course the demos were impressive. But did any of them give any details of gameplay away? No. What is the exact purpose of the handle on the back of the GameCube – yes, of course it's for portability, but why exactly is it there? Why is Nintendo making its 128bit console so mobile? What is its broadband strategy? Whatever, the time has come to go and play with the GBA units.

Expectedly, most rush to check on the handheld version of *Mario Kart*. Though still a significant way off, the fourplayer link-up mode is up and running, and the gameplay owes more to the SNES version than the acquired taste that is the 64bit update. Not that **Edge** ever doubted Nintendo would get it wrong twice, of course. A quick look at the press releases reveals a statement claiming that this is the biggest *Mario Kart* game to date. There's the obligatory Battle mode and rain and snow effects are also promised.

At times the scene becomes remarkably reminiscent to what you'd imagine a school trip to Disneyland to feel like

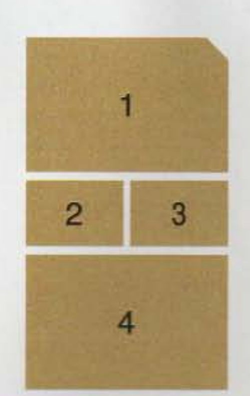
Fresh from this delightful experience, sizing up Konami's *Mario Kart* clone *Wai Wai Racing* seems appropriate. Frustratingly, there's surprisingly little to tell them apart. Both appear to play remarkably similarly (though *Wai Wai* currently doesn't offer link play), and, while it's easy to stick to Nintendo's game because of the familiarity of its cast of characters, *Wai Wai Racing*'s 16 strikingly outlandish locales and host of mini-games will undoubtedly win it much support.

Moving on – only one hour of play is allowed – **Edge** finds plenty of GBAs with *Silent Hill* carts curiously left alone. Within seconds, the text-based adventure using sections of FMV from the PS game has your correspondent looking for entertainment elsewhere. *Ougon No Taiyo*, a 30 per cent complete RPG from Camelot, looks the part, but sadly language difficulties again curtail the experience. Less approachable still is Nintendo's *Napoleon* sim. One or two players (via link up) take the role of the diminutive French war master in a stat-screen-heavy yet cute-looking action RTS, which should find a dedicated audience.



Eventually a gem is found. Eighting's *Kuru Kuru Kuru Rin* is an invigoratingly innovative puzzle game which features a continuously revolving bar that must be negotiated through a variety of courses against the clock. You lose energy every time any of the bar's extremities touches the course boundaries, and as things become increasingly difficult you're forced to use the speed-up button as a way of clearing some of the more treacherous sections. As with so many stupefyingly simple ideas, it's dangerously addictive.

1. An army of monitors welcomes the running, screaming and endless pushing that typifies Spaceworld's young audience 2. The previous day, Nintendo had unveiled its impressive N64 replacement to a frenzied audience (made up of significant numbers of US citizens) 3. Talk *Pokémon* and you win their unreserved attention, particularly three-metre-tall children with *Pokémon* news-enhancing Pikachu ears 4. No, this is mere minutes into the Friday, traditionally the quietest day of the show 5. GBA and its games proved one of the more popular attractions, though nothing could compete with the Nintendo shop 6. Champagne GC



1. Ganondorf in all his GameCuboid splendour readies himself for another one of Link's 128bit attacks **2.** Less interesting was *Meowth's Party*, which allowed the camera to be moved around in realtime **3.** In his cartoon-like world, Luigi had his own problems to deal with **4.** Super-textured Samus, meanwhile, delighted the crowd by running away from space rats before turning around and powering up her laser cannon

While the rest of the line-up fails to be particularly awe-inspiring, the official Spaceworld guide offers a tantalising glimpse into the GBA future. Of the 40 games shown, the screenshots of *F-Zero*, *Akuma jo Dracula: Circle of the Moon* (*Castlevania*) and Kotobuki Systems' *Top Gear: All Japan* racing title promise much, while the remaining mix of RPGs, war sims, puzzlers, platformers, wrestling and mandatory horse racing titles may well offer a lot less. Time, as ever, will tell.

The GBA experience survived, **Edge** scans the hall for familiar faces. Acclaim's Rod Cousens (who, for the record, is very excited about what he has just seen), is spotted chatting to NOA president Minoru Arakawa by the GameCube area, where more demos are being shown. (GameCube is not to feature at the real Spaceworld event, meaning all of the glass-cased GC units will be taken down overnight, before the unsuspecting public arrives tomorrow morning.) Suddenly, Arakawa-san is introducing Yuji Naka (known to attend regularly competitors' shows) to Cousens, sparking rumours that the Sonic Team members are moving across to Nintendo. The reality is (currently, at least) somewhat different – see this month's Frontend.

Looping video on two screens shows more GC-related demos. On one side, Silicon Knights shows FMV footage from *Rebirth* and *Too Human* as an indication of the potential for any developer wishing to use prerendered sequences in games. The other monitor soon proves far more interesting. On it is another demo of LucasArts' 'Star Wars' game, this time featuring TIE Fighters and X-Wings sorting out their differences mere metres above the surface of a Death Star-type construction. While still clearly some way from being fully operational, the game suddenly looks significantly more attractive than some 30 minutes ago, when it was showcased on the main stage alongside the other GC demos. Rare's Banjo and Kazooie are on next, and looking pretty in their 128bit makeover as they flee a posse of adversaries clearly intent on squashing the duo's fragile heads with the large polygonal clubs they brandish.

Remember *Rev Limit*? Once due out on N64 at a time that now seems far, far away, Seta's doomed racer has never enjoyed solid-state status. And while it's not likely to fare any better when it comes to 8cm, 1.5Gb optical discs, **Edge** can't help shed a metaphorical tear as it watches the next demo that simply features an increasing number of decent – if static – models of a Ferrari F50, a Dodge Viper and an F1 car revolving around the centre of the screen.

With that, the play hour is over and we're being asked to return to the neon streets of Tokyo, half an hour's train ride away. Or two hours should you decide to drive the same distance. Sat stuck in a traffic jam substantially longer than the average 128bit console's distance drawing ability, trains have never been so desirable.

Suddenly, Arakawa-san is introducing Yuji Naka to Cousens, sparking rumours that Sonic Team is moving over to Nintendo

However, conversation is dominated by GameCube and Game Boy Advance. Which is no bad thing.

Day two: *Pokémon*'s the star

The next morning, after at least three hours' sleep (how else did you think the Spaceworld hardware announcement made it into last month's issue?), your correspondent is surprisingly alert for someone whose breakfast consisted of three pieces of sushi and a can of chilled coffee. Escaping the 32°C heat and (more importantly) the 60-odd per cent humidity by rushing in to the Makuhari Messe Spaceworld-designated hall, the contrast with yesterday's scene couldn't be more pronounced. Thousands of excited children are dragging their parents in every conceivable direction. This is *Pokémon* country – bags, T-shirts, socks, keyrings, stickers, badges, watches, and Pikachu ears. You name it, someone is wearing it. For the next 72 hours a sizeable chunk of each day's main stage activities is devoted to finding the *Pokémon Stadium* champion. Sadly, there's work to do.

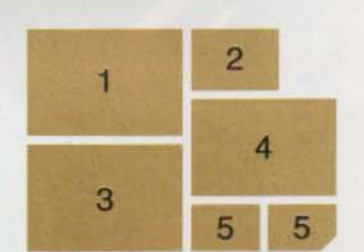
Today, Friday, is the first of Spaceworld's three public days. Unlike the Tokyo Game Show, which schedules a press day before opening its doors to the masses, here a press badge carries no weight. Want to play a game? Then you can queue along with everyone else. And when you consider that, on some of the more popular titles (in this case, the GBA games), you can watch other people playing for up to an hour before you're allowed your five-minute bash, you get an idea of how time-consuming it can all become. A strategic approach to covering the event is essential.

As such, **Edge** ignores the entire Game Boy Color section. With the GBA games already taken care of, that just leaves the N64 portion. Immediately, *WWF Wrestlemania 2000* is off the 'must play again' list, closely followed by Disney's *World Dancing Museum* (*Dance Dance Revolution* featuring mice, ducks and dogs). Interestingly, *Perfect Dark* has undergone some slight cosmetic changes. In order to tie Joanna Dark closer to her real-life version from the television advert, and hence appeal to the Japanese market, her facial features have been tweaked. Although **Edge** can't get anyone at Rare to confirm this, her thoraxic topography appears to have been accentuated, too. Still, at least gameplay changes seem non-existent. And while we're in Twycross-developed territory, *Mickey's Speedway USA* is also here. It's no more fun than it was at E3 last May (which is to say it's not bad at all), but by this point **Edge** finds it hard to get genuinely excited about cartoony karting games. Call it overkill, if you will. Which is exactly what Capcom's *Rock Man Dash* feels like.

Day three: In Miyamoto's orbit

Saturday is Shigeru Miyamoto interview day. Having taken it easy while everyone else overindulged the previous night, **Edge** arrives conscientiously clear-headed this morning. By 11am, the interview over (see p78), the first of the big titles lies but three people (ie 15 minutes) away. **Edge** has had its eye on Treasure's *Sin And Punishment* since news emerged in early August and, reassuringly, every five-minute Spaceworld play is worth the wait (see p32). But a quick glance at the clock reveals that the time has come to go and queue elsewhere.

Enter CleverTrick's *Echo-Delta* (working title), a submarine search-and-rescue game which, allows you, the pilot of the sub, 18 minutes to locate and salvage a sunken ship lying on the ocean floor. Naturally, there's a little more to it than simple search-and-rescue duties – enemies keen to engage you in battle show up and you have little choice but to humour them. Fortunately, the ocean bed is awash with resources which you locate and collect using your scout sub. These are then used to activate the production facility, which in turn powers up the gun turrets surrounding it in preparation for the enemy's attack. Don't forget to rescue the sunken ship before the time limit runs out. A twoplayer option is available and, as far as **Edge** can tell, the maps are randomly generated, offering endless level variety. It's both



1. *Mario Kart Advance* could recreate the SNES version's magic **2.** *Napoleon* could prove engaging **3.** Camelot's *Ougon no Taiyo* was technically impressive **4.** *Wai Wai Racing* **5.** The excellent *Kuru Kuru Kuru Rin*

Lv11 HP 49/ 73
50G

06:07

ビクトリクス 6節Lv5
HP 84
HP 261/315
カンムリジンバ 4節Lv16

02:49
ENG 485
PLN

appealing and entertaining, even if a five-minute play in the brutally noisy Spaceworld atmosphere aren't the best conditions in which to sample such an involved title.

Far more appropriate for exhibition in this environment is HudsonSoft's *Mario Party 3*. It may feature 70 new mini-games spread across ten map boards, but gameplay-wise, the title won't send shockwaves across the Pacific Ocean. One or two improvements aside, this is more of the same multiplayer madness that has already graced the N64 on two previous occasions. Anyone who has experienced either of those with three joypad-brandishing friends won't be complaining. Unless you lose the wooden-horse race playing against a sniggering trio of Japanese children, of course. Dwindling eye-hand coordination – an indisputable sign of too much Spaceworlding.

Day four: Nintendo has landed

If possible, Sunday has attracted even more little ones than Saturday managed to. Seeing a relatively short queue for *Wonder Dungeon: Furai No Shiren 2*, **Edge** wastes little time. This colourful oneplayer action-RPG requires you to wander the land searching for materials with which to build a castle that will protect your village against the evil Ogre family. Interestingly, dungeons are randomly generated, and many of the items found can be combined to form more powerful weapons. The experience certainly rates as more than a little lightweight by *Legend Of Zelda* standards, but most of the young Spaceworld attendees looked happy.

Featuring nicely animated robots fighting each other within obstacle-ridden arenas, *Custom Robo V2* was also popular with the youthful crowd. A new fourplayer mode for this sequel has been added, allowing tag team encounters and the usual combo attack options by joining forces with your combative partner. And a robot fighting game wouldn't be complete without the ability to customise your loveable Robo. While not quite *Virtual On*, you could do worse than lose a couple of hours exploring the game's fascinating Scenario mode.

Unfortunately, the show attendees disagree and move your correspondent on after 300 seconds have elapsed. Across the aisle is *Doubutsu Bancho*, possibly Spaceworld's most intriguing title. Due for release in January, this is an evolutionary action game featuring low-polygon-count animals roaming around an equally angular landscape. Your goal is to hunt and feed off other animals as a way of eventually evolving your way to the top of the ladder. Naturally, all of the animals carry HP bars, and although **Edge** was unable to determine whether events occur in realtime (some of the Japanese made certain game aspects impenetrable), your creature does require sleep.

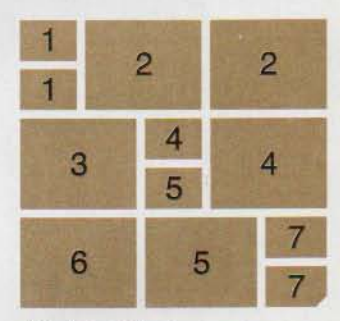
One title that features animals and is entirely in realtime is Nintendo's *Doubutsu No Mori* (working title). Walking around the forest you can talk to animals, take on jobs in your village, redecorate your

LucasArts' 'Star Wars' game features TIE Fighters and X-Wings battling mere metres above a Death Star-type construction

room (after you've bought your house), and, as the game undergoes seasonal changes in realtime, expect to be planting flowers in spring, watching fireworks displays in summer (a Japanese tradition), collecting fruit in the autumn, and celebrating Christmas come winter time. It's a thoroughly engaging concept that sadly proves mostly unplayable due to language differences. Still, it serves as an exciting indication of possible things to come.

Having run out of things to queue up for, **Edge** retires from Spaceworld duty and heads off to the train station where hundreds of children await the train back to Tokyo. They're still running around. They're still talking – or rather shouting – about the wonder of everything *Pokémon*. Seven hours of queuing, playing, queuing, playing, queuing and queuing has seemingly done little to wear down their hyperactive tendencies. Their parents, on the other hand, look as though they've barely survived the experience. And most of them only have a year to recover before having to do it all again, of course.

Next year's event should coincide with GameCube's release. Chances are **Edge** will then be doing some running and shouting of its own.



1. *Mario Party 3*, due for release in December (Japan), refines the elements of the previous incarnations **2.** One of the more interesting titles at the show, realtime adventure game *Doubutsu No Mori* (due in Japan next February) could instigate a whole new sub-genre **3.** Looking a little young for **Edge**'s taste, *Wonder Dungeon: Furai No Shiren 2* should be out by the time you read this **4.** *Custom Robo V2* proved popular with the crowds, even if the premise may be a little limited **5.** *Echo-Delta*, out in December in Japan, is an ingenious and engaging concept **6.** *Doubutsu Bancho* (due January), meanwhile, is wonderfully odd **7.** *Sin And Punishment*, previewed on p32

Shigeru Miyamoto

A Spaceworld report would not be complete without a Q&A session with Nintendo's legend. Edge started at the beginning, and then moved on to GameCube...

Shigeru Miyamoto is, it's fair to say, the most influential person working in the videogames industry. It's also fair to say that without him Nintendo wouldn't have got this far. Away from the madness of *Pokémon* XS-sized T-shirts that is Spaceworld, **Edge** sits the world's greatest videogame designer down to find out what happens next for him and Nintendo.

What was the first game you played?
Western Gun. It was an arcade game – a cowboy shooting game between two characters [who moved] between cacti.

What was the first machine you owned?
I think it was a TV Game 15, introduced by Nintendo. It was a *Pong*-type game.

Do you remember the first thing you created on a computer?
Actually I couldn't touch a PC at all, and even now I dislike PCs (I don't even have my own PC yet). My job doesn't necessarily require me to manipulate a computer because I'm always working with the programmers. I'm [very] much the analogue type myself, I guess. But when I think about it, the first time I probably created something using a PC was when I created the Mario character for *Donkey Kong*. I programmed the Mario character, burned it on to a ROM and handed out to our programmer.

When you started developing videogames, you started with very small teams, perhaps five or six people. Now you're supervising 30 games at a time, with huge teams. How do you feel about that? Do you feel more free to create?
Honestly speaking, I preferred to have a small team. But if I have to make only one game at one time, it's kind of stressful for me, so I'd rather work on more projects at once. At the moment I'm seeing too many videogames, so I cannot fully enjoy myself. But, as I said, we want games to be played by the whole family, so we're connecting GameCube and Game Boy Advance, implementing communication networks, and so on and so forth, so this is a new approach, and making this work is actually really fun for me right now.

Where do you get your inspiration and ideas from nowadays?
I have a kind of rational approach here – I always think what I'd like to do myself, and the kind of game I'd like to play myself. So I start with a technical experiment and have plenty of conversations and discussions, and then, in most cases, I can get some kind of conclusion about the 'play' I want to have. Or, I think: Is this going to please gameplayers, or surprise them?

What's your favourite game ever?
I really don't know, but if you ask me what's the game that I most often played, I think it's *Pac-Man*. You know, in those days I was looking at games from the perspective of a designer's eyes, and *Pac-Man* was the only game which I could evaluate from the perfect design point of view and which I could enjoy playing myself.

What was the last game you played?
Well, last week I touched *Legend of Zelda* on Game Boy because we are currently working on that [laughs]. But seriously, if you ask me [the last game I] played, then it was *Samba de Amigo* with my children.

What is it about *Samba de Amigo* that you particularly like?
Well, I play it with my children – as a matter of fact, with my whole family – and I often ask my wife what my budget limit is for buying this kind of game, and she'll say: "Oh, ¥10,000 or so, because it is very good," which is amazing, because if the children say they'd like to buy a toy or gadget, then the budget limit my wife will give will be around ¥2-3,000. So, it depends on how good an impression you can give the whole family, and I think I like *Samba de Amigo* because I like this kind of family entertainment. Within a few years, most of the men who have experienced playing *Super Mario* when it was first introduced will become fathers, and after work they'll return home and play some games with their children. I think that's the kind of play style I like. Maybe this is not something an **Edge** reporter will like, but I actually don't like the idea of a father working late at night, returning home to play a network game alone in a room and [not even] bother to look at the children's faces. I just don't really like that kind of scenario.

How many hours a week do you spend playing games?
It's hard to tell. You know, I'm 47 years old now. But when I was a lot younger I would still play three to four hours a week. But now when I touch a games machine it's work, not entertainment. At home, sometimes when my children have problems clearing some stages and they need some help...

Do you usually beat your children at games?
Yeah, but it's getting harder and harder because my eldest son, who is 15 now, is pretty good.

Do you still go to arcades, and which games do you look for?
Again, when I go to arcade centres I'm going for business, not to enjoy myself, but of course we'll try out [the games]. I like racing games and those rhythm-action games, except I never really feel like playing on *Dance Dance Revolution*. I'm a shy person, you know.

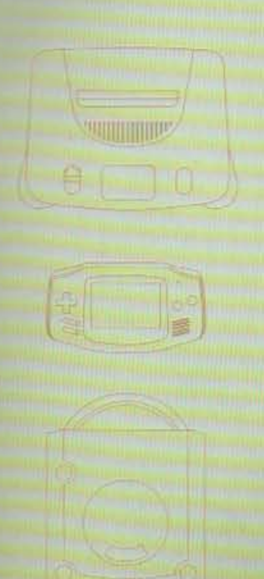
Is there a game you would particularly have liked to have worked on?
I think it would be *Virtua Fighter*, because at that time we had an idea that was similar, and we could understand how to construct the whole system for a *Virtua Fighter*-type game, but unfortunately we didn't have the hardware which could realise that kind of concept. I'm not specifically talking about a fighting game, but I'm talking about making polygon models, big characters and showing the animated movements of persons. So probably that game – I wouldn't say I would have wanted to join the project, but that was the game that I really wanted to make myself at the time. As you know, we were making *Punch Out* before them.

Nintendo has mentioned that GameCube is going to be very easy to develop for – how will this happen?
This is a pretty tough question from a technical point of view, but if I can, I'll try to explain. The game designers start working on certain data, they spend a certain amount of time on this; and then they give it to the programmer, who will then try and realise this data [as a game] on the computer screen. First of all, it will be easier to have a standardised format of these processes.

> "For N64 and PS2, it's tough work to create a good 3D engine; in the case of GameCube we have shown a 'power bar' which indicates the time needed to realise high-detail effects"

We'll also have a standardised set of development tools, so the cost of developing [for GameCube] will be highly decreased, and designers will be able to afford one set of development tools for themselves.

From a programmer's standpoint, the 'computer language' that we use will make programming for GameCube much, much simpler [than anything else]. As an example, for N64 and PS2, it's tough work to create a good 3D engine; in the case of GameCube – as you have seen – we have shown a 'power bar' which indicates the speed or time necessary to realise high-detail effects. So, once you've created an engine, you still need to take into account what



effects you need and how it is going to affect the processing time. But, whatever effects you want to use will not largely affect the processing time. This will be the biggest advantage for game developers on GameCube, as they don't have to minimise the processing time for special effects.

At Spaceworld we have unveiled the 1T SRAM technology, and whilst I'm not in a position to boast, this is the world's best graphics chip.

What can you say about the projects you're working on at the moment?

Well, as you may know, I now have a bigger responsibility at Nintendo as one of the board of directors, and I have to see the much bigger picture on the creative side of the games. For example, my responsibility now includes the Game Boy Advance, and I am supervising about 30 titles at one time, and I cannot be deeply involved in many of them. So, honestly speaking, I'm only deeply involved in about two or three projects – for example, *Zelda* and the *Mario* series. I really want to make something very unique, very different. And now that you've seen the *Mario 128* demo, that's a finished, working demo, so I'm hoping I can release it when we release GameCube – free of charge.

Which elements of your current projects do you expect to impress gamers the most?

It's not going to be the more beautiful graphics. I'm not talking about the beauty of graphics, more about dynamic images utilising 3D images.

"It's the Nintendo company motto that we have to do what only Nintendo can do… the multi-purpose games machines often end up not being able to do anything"

As you saw in my demonstration, there were many, many Marios on screen, and you could play with each of them. So, what's impressive is the dynamism you can feel through the controller – you are going to feel: I have never done this, I have never experienced this. I think I'm talking about something that is very close to being realised now, because we now have the machine – the GameCube – with which to make that dream come true. So it's a kind of new feeling I would like to give to game users. On the one hand, I'm working on dynamic games that you can feel the dynamism with. On the other, I'm also working on the more static games sort of games.

Are you in any way disappointed about not working with cartridges any more?

Within a couple of years, you'll know. GameCube is going to have a lot of RAM on the console itself, and while we can't tell you how much at this time, it will be a lot. So [as far as loading times are concerned], I don't think you're going to see much difference in terms of having cartridges or not. And, of course, now we're not using cartridges, there's going to be much less cost involved. Now we can have much more RAM for less cost, so it's a kind of compromise. Of course, we have to be mindful of loading times, but we have noticed that many gameplayers on the PlayStation are very generous when it comes to waiting over loading.

With PS2, Dreamcast and GameCube, there's a console war brewing. What are your weapons, and how will you win this war?

Well, we certainly don't have the intention to fight against anybody else. Don't think that we are cowards, but we are working on the subjects which become necessary for what game users want. In other words, what we have to do in order to make a 'weapon', to use your words, is to make fresh and exciting games. It's not like who's winning and who's losing, and as far as 'war' or 'fighting' is concerned, please count us out. We like to go our own way.

One of the biggest concepts concerning GameCube is that I want it to be a machine the whole family can use. That's why it must be reasonably priced and accessible even for small children, and these kinds of concepts are enshrined in the controller design, console design and the cheap chipsets.

Most next-generation consoles that are appearing nowadays are offering all-in-one entertainment, like Internet capabilities and DVD movie playing. Yet you decided to head in a direction where you're solely dedicated to gaming and nothing else. What led to you making this decision?

It's very simple. It's the Nintendo company motto that we have to do what only Nintendo can do, and the multi-purpose games machines – meaning that you can do a variety of things – often end up being the machines that can't do anything. In the case of Nintendo, it's rather different. What Nintendo can be proud of is constantly providing the customer with guaranteed quality software. That's what we can say when we're providing the customer with a new generation of gaming platforms. On the other hand, people are talking about multi-purpose machines, and from the manufacturer's standpoint, they're saying 'look, we've made this machine, it's up to you how to use it'. Through the many years I've been in this business, I've seen many hardware manufacturers simply ignore what content will be running on their platforms. I have to admit that I don't like these kind of ideas. Now is the time that we, the content creators, have to get together to lead the market. Nintendo is good at entertaining, and we are going to guarantee with this new platform that it is going to be fun. And, of course, it has the capability for 'multi purpose' use, but we are not guaranteeing it's going to be multi-purpose, that's all.

Having said that, Nintendo has been experimenting with the network technologies utilising mobile [phone] technologies. At this point in time, I have to say we haven't the reached the point where we can name games and content – we have just started these experiments with the Game Boy, and in the near future we are confident we can link several Nintendo platforms together. That's what we're doing at the moment.

There is going to be a modem and a broadband adaptor available for GameCube. Will it launch with games that can use these, or will that come later?

Of course we are looking into this, but I simply cannot say which software will take advantage of it. But we are targetting the launch so that some kind of game will take advantage of the modem technology that will be launched simultaneously with the GameCube. When it comes to the specific networking that Nintendo has shown – the mobile adaptor that utilises the Game Boy/Game Boy Advance, the linking of Game Boy Advance and GameCube, and *Pokémon Crystal* – these kind of things will be launched soon. Basically, we are going to expand entertainment by linking the platforms we have.

What would you say is the best thing about being known as the creator of Mario?

Firstly, Mario was created not only by myself, but also with Mr Tezuka. I am kind of shy accepting all of the compliments myself all the time. But I think one thing that we liked most after creating Mario was that somehow we got to a postion where we could make whatever project without asking the permission of our sponsors. Of course, we asked our bosses to accept our plans, but it was just like: "Look, we have this plan so we're going to do this," and they would agree. We just didn't have to worry about the budget, be it ¥200m or even ¥1bn. We didn't have to ask the bank to give us the go ahead – we could just proceed with whatever plan we wanted to carry out. And primarily because of that, our people took pride in taking things to the very limit, until things were very detailed and

finished. And I believe our people continue to take strong pride in themselves and in the quality of the things we make. Of course it's tough, it's not easy, but at the same time it's a very enjoyable atmosphere to work in, so that other than the troubles associated with creating something new, we really have no problems, you know. That's what I believe to be good about the success of *Super Mario Bros*.

With the game and the movie industries moving closer together, where do you see games going in the future?
I think this is interesting, simply because nobody can tell what will happen in the future. Some may say the 'movie-type' game will become interesting, but I don't think so. The integration between the movie and the game should not be the main focus of this industry; yes, we can learn a lot from the movie industry, but we should absorb these ideas so we can improve game content, so we can evolve the shape of games. That's the kind of thing that makes sense in this industry. If we are simply trying to make a movie-style game, then I don't think that's so good. After all, we are making interactive entertainment. I don't want to say that videogames are transforming into any other existing entertainment medium. President Yamauchi has some different ideas, though.

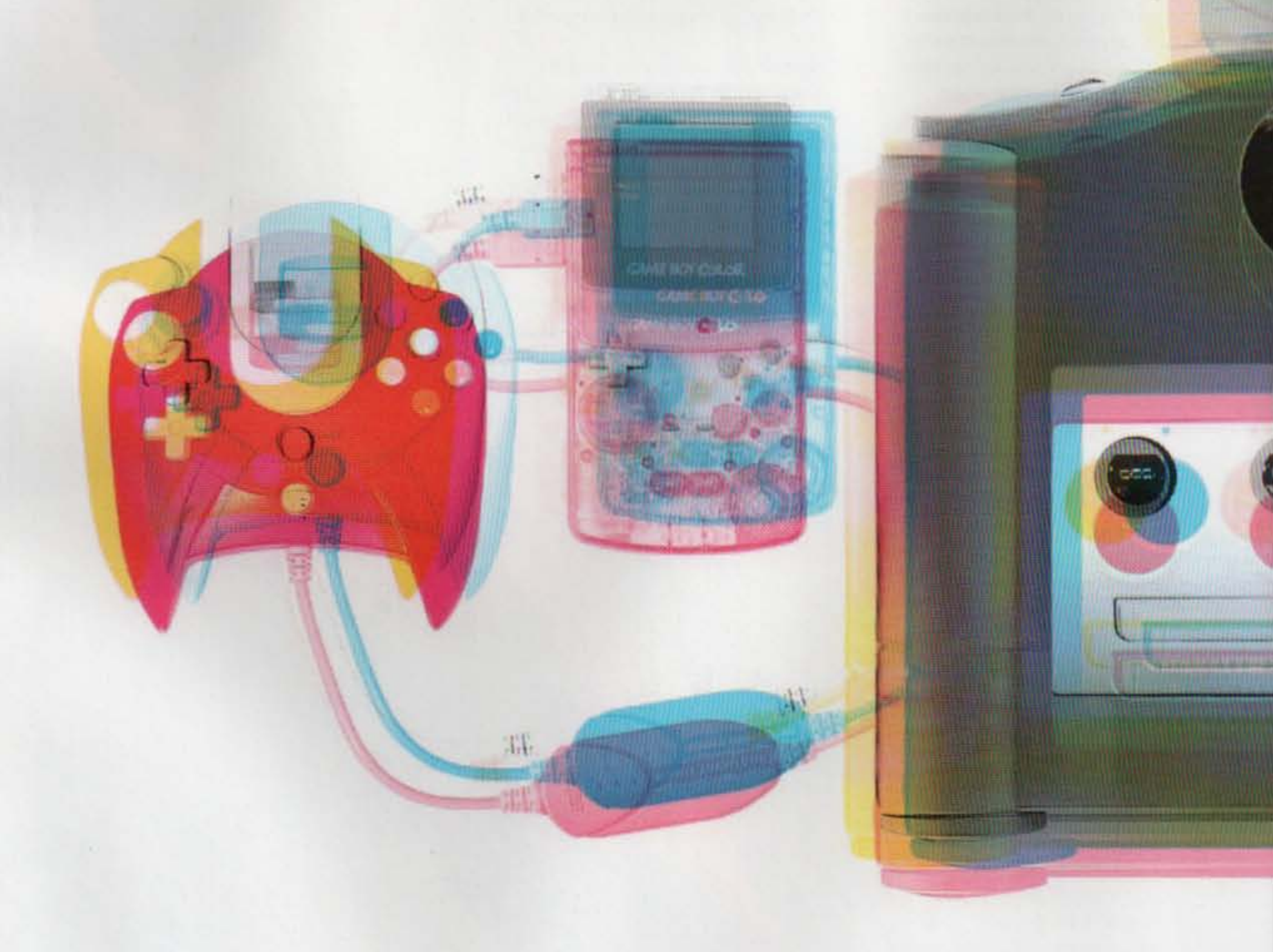
I believe that the entertainment business is kind of an industry which puts different value to 'ordinary stories', so they can sell them at much higher prices. This is the kind of business where you can make money out of a simple idea, and when people say 'we are going to make a 'movie-type game', they are saying 'let's spend huge amounts of money on the gorgeous graphics and sound'. I don't think that that's the shape of the games industry. We should be spending time and money making magic.

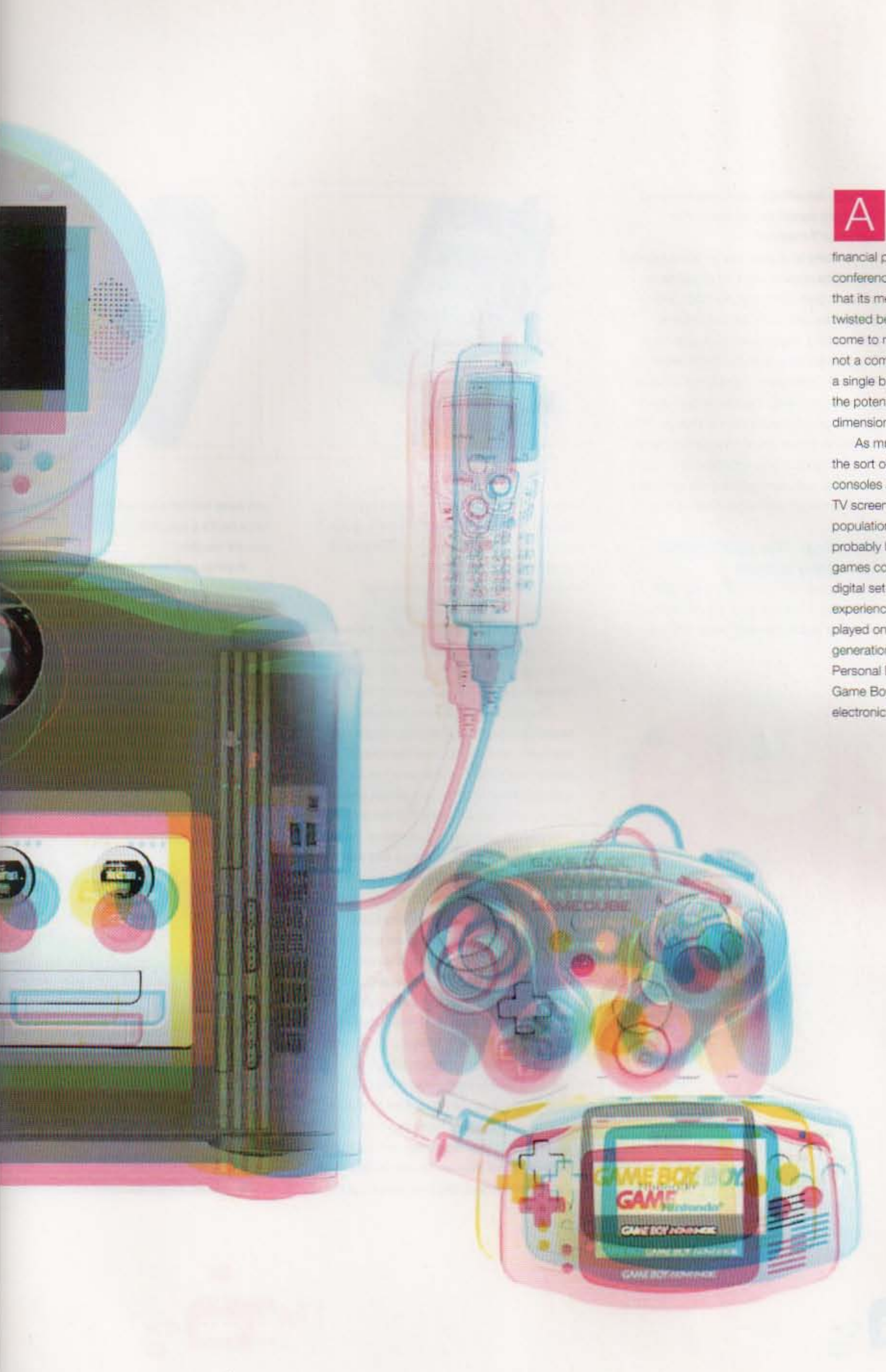
Who from the gaming industry do you admire the most?
Generally, I don't have any specific person whom I respect. Of course, in my usual daily life I have met many people who are interesting, but I really don't have any specific person whom I respect. I'm the kind of person who appreciates some portions of the work people are doing, like I admire this portion of *Dragon Quest* which is done by Mr Hori, I admire that portion of *Final Fantasy* by Mr Sakaguchi, I like this portion of *Seaman* by Sato, and I like this portion by Mr Tezuka. That is generally the way I admire things. Last year, Mr Yamauchi was visiting Spaceworld and saw many family members enjoying themselves, and he was pretty happy at that time and said: "Next year we are going to have Spaceworld once again." And I also remember [in 1993] Mr Nakamura, who is now the chairman of Namco – Namco was also having a consumer show, at that time they were working on [*Ridge Racer*] utilising an actual MX-5 Roadster car – and he went to the Namco show and he looked very, very happy and he said that was his dream. And actually, looking at Mr Yamauchi and Mr Nakamura I thought: "They're really great". Of course, in day-to-day business they have to look for the profits, but in the end they're looking forward to something – a goal or objective of the whole mission of their lives – and last year at Spaceworld show I believe Mr Yamauchi, and at that [Namco] show Mr Nakamura, saw something that they had always been looking forward to. So, I really liked seeing them looking at these people at that time.

Finally, do you still play the banjo?
I'm really bad on the banjo. Sometimes I play, but most of the time when I'm playing with my friends I'm playing guitar and others are playing banjo. I'm really bad on the banjo.

Convergence

Everything from phones to handheld computers and personal organisers has taken to multi-tasking – even the dumb boxes that sit on top of the TV are getting connected. While this will impact across the board, it may revolutionise the way the world plays games in particular. **Edge** gauges industry opinion on the subject





Although few will admit it, for most industry figures the 'c' word is beyond the pale. Only used in financial prospectuses and high-concept conference speeches, it has been so misused that its meaning has been confused and twisted beyond recognition. The time has come to regain some focus: convergence is not a coming together of technology to create a single black superbox. Think of it more as the potential explosion of gaming into every dimension of everyday life.

As much as Sony and Microsoft desire the sort of convergence that positions their consoles as the gateway to the living-room TV screen, for the majority of the European population PlayStation2 and X-Box will probably be viewed, bought and used as games consoles. Instead, game-viable digital set-top boxes will offer new gaming experiences for the majority that has never played on a console. Equally, will next-generation mobile phones merge with Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and Game Boys to create all-singing, all-dancing electronic bricks? A key to the answer

What does convergence mean?

Jonathan Small, head of Fiendish Games

"Convergence is a multitude of different devices which before were dumb, increasing in power and becoming connected such that they are able to do things that weren't possible before."

Jonas Eneroth, MD, Wired Realms

"It's where the whole is greater than the sum of its part. You're bringing together many disparate parts that together give you a better gameplay experience simply by the nature of being connected up to the Internet."

Glen O'Connell, head of communications, Rage

"In simple terms convergence provides far greater opportunities and a greater gaming experience. If we can develop a range of game titles that the user can choose to play through a wealth of different devices, we feel this will add to the overall game playing experience."

Tim Gummer, director of Gameplay Studios

"The nirvana of convergence is for everyone to be playing on different platforms with no benefit or disadvantage."

Christophe Comparin, MD, I.Lights, Infogrames

"We see future games as a broad experience including different platforms that will make the games look more like part of our life. Players will be able to keep in touch with different games in different places all day long."

probably lies with the convergence classic: how many people do you know with combined TV/videos?

Similarly, to argue about which companies will win the console war is to be misled by tradition. Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo should all walk out winners in real, bottom-line terms. Nokia, Motorola and Ericsson have the potential to do well, too, and the likes of Psion and Palm are in with a shout. What is occurring is nothing less than a revolution in the way games are played, the devices those games are played on and the type of games played. The electronic entertainment industry is close to a situation where it has previously undreamt-of access to the public at large.

Rule one: You can't reach too many people

One man who understands the potential of this 'super-massmarket' is Infogrames' president **Bruno Bonnell**. "Infogrames is one of the few companies that believe this convergence of technologies is like a dream," he says. "I believe there is common ground to all this technology, such as telecommunications, computers and entertainment, but each of these businesses are extremely specific. I believe in one application per box. I believe in a Walkman or I believe in a DVD and I don't believe in a black box doing everything."

The only global publisher seriously targeting converging platforms, Infogrames has been making interactive television (iTV) content since 1987, and already has a substantial presence in such diverse areas as theme-park rides and in-flight entertainment.

"One of our missions is to deliver games to the largest possible audience and every single second there are one million people in the air," Bonnell says, justifying the majority stake Infogrames bought in in-flight and embedded system entertainment specialist Den-O-Tech International, since renamed DTI-Infogrames. The Montreal-based studio is currently working on translating existing Infogrames titles such as *V-Rally*, *Silver* and *Outcast* to in-flight systems. At E3 it demonstrated a multiplayer title called *Niflheim Deathmatch*, which allows up to six passengers to play against each other.

"When people are flying, they have no opportunity to play our games and we didn't like that," jokes Bonnell. "So we are testing in-flight entertainment, first as a new marketing and sales tool for our products, second because it's a way of life to play when you are travelling."

Another area that Infogrames is concentrating on is developing server technology to utilise the connectivity of emerging devices and traditional consoles, creating new gaming experiences. Called I-Server, it will allow a multitude of devices to interact within the same game space.

Christophe Comparin, MD of Infogrames' global gaming division, I.Lights,

While convergence has excited the great and the good of the games industry, the question remains whether consumers will be willing to trade their beloved selections of gadgets for a multi-use product

explains. "I-Server is an object server that can customise the game objects it sends out depending on the client software. The objects talk to each other to see what features the device supports and the server can arbitrate. This means that Dreamcast, Playstation2, PC, mobile devices and WAP phones can share the same objects in realtime." I-Server is expected to go live in December, and, according to Comparin, one of the ways it will work is that you could get a message on your phone about a high score achieved on PS2.

Rule two: The (casual) customer is always right

"Convergence is a multitude of different devices, which before were dumb, increasing in power and becoming connected such that they are able to do things that weren't possible before," states **Jonathan Small**, when asked to provide a definition. As head of Fiendish Games, a separate studio within Criterion Software, Small's driving force is to 'put the fun back into games'.

"About a year ago we were looking at the possibilities of distributing games, and it became clear that games for the Web and set-top boxes weren't getting the attention they deserved. So we set up Fiendish games as an experiment," he explains. Twelve months on, Fiendish has released a range of games over a number of different platforms. There are the five Web games designed for Sega's Dreamcast portal, Dreamarena. A selection of classic games such as backgammon and poker are being rolled out on NTL's digital set-top boxes, a WAP pub quiz is live – if not yet commercially available – and Fiendish's download-only PC games are getting hundreds of thousands of hits. None of these games would be considered cutting-edge.

"I think hardcore gamers have confused the industry because a lot of developers try to produce games on the assumption that if hardcore gamers like them, they will filter down," explains Small. "To a certain extent that's true but a hardcore gamer wants complexity. The more casual gamer wants to be able to just pick a game up and get some fun out of it immediately. The fact that there isn't 40 hours of gameplay isn't a problem because most people don't play games for more than a few hours anyway."

Rage's *Internet Football Club* management sim has WAP functionality thanks to its flexible server technology

Rule three: Fewer games, many devices

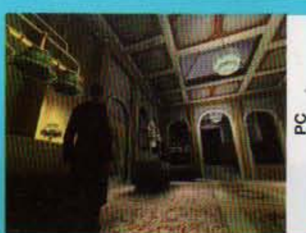
Although less ambitious in scope, UK developer-turned-publisher Rage Software is also in the process of reinventing itself. Its browser-based *Internet Football Club* (*IFC*) football management sim is about as cross-platform as a game can presently be, supporting PC, Mac, Linux and WAP phones.

"The game is driven from a central database and runs using standard Web

Cross-platform development, the old-fashioned way

Before convergence, the old-fashioned way to handle cross-platform development was to have separate teams porting the same game for each individual platform. At its worst, situations such as EA's *The World Is Not Enough* existed whereby the game is being developed for four different platforms – N64, PS, PC and PS2, using three different game engines. In future, the solution could be one scalable game providing access to a multitude of different devices.

N64



PC

PlayStation

PlayStation2

With three WAP games already available, Gameplay will enter the big league of game development with its massively multiplayer title *Online Pirates*. The title is scheduled to launch in the early stages of next year

technologies such as Flash4, so we reformat the output on to whatever device the user is connecting through," explains **Glen O'Connell**, Rage's head of communications. Flash4 is only available via a PC-type device, but as and when platforms such as Dreamcast support the protocol, O'Connell sees no reason why they shouldn't connect into *IFC* as well. "We've got plans to do an iTV version in the near future," he explains. The WAP version of the game also runs from the same database and is simply reformatted to use text-only XML functionality. And while, at present, it's only possible to view your team's results through WAP, Rage has plans to develop a fully functional version of the game for other wireless technologies.

"Java is being talked about by people like Motorola and Nokia, who see it adding real value to content in their next range of mobile devices," O'Connell adds, pointing out that the cross-platform language gives developers the opportunity to get their products onto a wide range of platforms without too much additional work. Despite its restrictions, Red Storm, the US-based developer of *Rainbow Six*-fame, has been developing boxed retail Java-based PC titles for a number of years. Most recent was its turn-based action game *Shadow Watch*.

Fiendish's Jonathan Small agrees that cross-platform programming languages provide interesting opportunities, although personally he is not a fan of Java. "It has compatibility issues and you lose performance, so it's not terribly appealing," he says. "Something I think is an exceptionally good technology is ActiveX [Microsoft's distributed object technology]. It's had a bad press, but with that sort of C-based component technology, you can do anything. If you wanted to run *Quake* from a Web browser with ActiveX it would be trivial."

Rule four: Everyone wants to play

Another example of the novel thinking inspired by convergence comes from the latest offshoot from UK publisher Eidos. Officially formed two weeks before ECTS, Wired Realms is basking in the creative juices of starting its first major project: a large, persistent world operating under the working title *Fifth Sanction*.

"The issue is how to access a game using different types of technology. How do we converge all these?" asks MD **Jonas Eneroth**. "*Fifth Sanction* is modular in its approach, so it's easy to scale up or down to different platforms, but you can scale up on your own platform, too."

Although currently in its early stages, the concept behind the game is that a player will be able to access through a host of different devices, from a PC to a third-generation mobile phone or anything that runs a Web browser. There is even talk of whether

Designed to run on a digital set-top box, Fiendish's backgammon is one of the first multiplayer games to be offered through iTV (other games include *Tower Of The Ancients*, *Jetboat Superchamps*, *MAD*, *Hunt For The Red Baron*, and *HotChix 'N' GearStix*). At the heart of Fiendish Games' philosophy is downloadable PC games that are limited to 15Mb and cost £10

In future more games will be:

Abstract	If it ever did, plot doesn't matter now
Cheap	Both to buy and develop
Connected	By a variety of devices
Easy	If you want people to play, don't make it hard
Fun	If you only play two levels you will enjoy them both
Simple	Just pick up and play
Short	You can download more levels as you go

Convergence now

If any example is needed of how convergence will shape the games industry, go to any online games portal and check out how many people are playing and what type of games. An Internet connected PC is the best current example of convergence. As this article was being written, at Microsoft's games zone [http://zone.msn.com] there were 2,907 people playing bridge, 549 playing *MechWarrior III*, 71 playing *Warcraft II* and 15 playing *Forsaken*. Similarly at Mplayer [www.mplayer.com], the 858 *Rogue Spear* combatants were outgunned by the 1,592 playing spades. *MechWarrior* attracted 85 players.

At E3 earlier this year, GTI-Infogrames demonstrated its sixplayer multiplayer title designed for in-flight entertainment, *Nifheim Deathmatch*, using the cabin mock-up shown above

it can use the upcoming BlueTooth wireless technology in some way.

"Something we are very interested in is how you can integrate different devices into the same game. Say you are using your PC or console as your main portal, but you can have other types of technology that you can use to access the same data space. Something simple is SMS messaging. You can be notified you haven't played for week or that your friend has just logged in," Eneroth says. "It lets you add another point of connectivity and allows you keep in contact with friends in a more '24/7'-type way, which will bring in a lot more people."

Glen O'Connell also stresses the importance of attracting a new type of gamer. "When designing games, particularly the wireless Internet, we must recognise the need to reach out to a far greater audience than, say, a PC or PlayStation game. A large number of these people may have very little gameplay experience," he says. As Jonas Eneroth puts it: "How do you reach the *Tetris* audience?"

For **Tim Gummer**, veteran of stints at Psygnosis, Argonaut, Acclaim and now director of Gameplay studios, the key to unlocking this type of massively cross-platform massmarket game is a simple question: why?

"It is only important if the games requires a large number of users, and therefore the type of game will be different to most of what we have seen before," he explains. "Most massively multiplayer online play is about hardcore gamers. What sort of gaming experience would make people connect with different technologies?"

Considering one of his development teams already working on a 3D persistent online PC game currently known as *Online Pirates*, his answer is surprisingly old-fashioned. "I could have a MUD [Multi User Dungeon] running tomorrow," he says, pointing out that the out-of-vogue text adventures are at just the right technological level for interaction with even SMS-equipped mobile phones. "Traditionally, MUDs are about the older player, but it's mostly about the context," Gummer continues. "If I did a MUD about raves rather than about wizards you can bet your life a load of people would love to play it." And with the grandfather of MUDs, Richard Bartle, heading up a MUD development group for Gameplay, it seems likely that Gummer will be backing up his arguments with action before too long.

Rule five: The future is always getting closer

But while many challenges remain, the whole gaming community – even the doubters – are convinced change is coming. The question is how fast will it revolutionise the games industry? "At the moment everyone can see convergence is happening. People play games on mobile phones but the games are actually a bit naff," reckons Jonathan Small. "It's going to probably take longer than people expect, but when it comes it's going to be big."

Bruno Bonnell agrees: "The Internet is clearly perceived as a massmarket medium, but in terms of speed and complexity, for games it is still far too complex to seduce a large audience. As far as Infogrames is concerned that's why we have been so slow. Now with the broadband coming, we will show rapidly that we are moving in this direction."

When the president of one of the five biggest electronic entertainment companies in the world says those words, it becomes clear why so many people are scared of the concept of convergence. It really is going to change the industry. Just watch.

Playing on the Web

There are already a multitude of Web browser games available on the Internet. One of the most interesting is *Waronline* [http://waronline.net]. Claiming to be the first online graphical realtime strategy game, it mixes strategy and resource management in a multiplayer environment. Starting with a base, you must gain resources, build an army and take over the map. Moving troops and attacking enemies takes place in realtime, while resources and building status are updated every hour, giving the game a turn-based element as well. The main problem however is viewing and using the map within the browser. Microsoft-phobes will also be saddened to learn *Waronline* doesn't support Netscape yet, either.

Proving the potential of convergence and associated technological advances, developer Red Storm developed the graphic novel-inspired title *Shadow Watch* (above) using the cross-platform programming language Java

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Videogames on the Edge

Titles slowing productivity this month

Vagrant Story

There are unlikely to be any sequels to this title, since the development team is rumoured to have been laid off, but its replayability factor is second to none.

(PS) SquareSoft

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn

Although review code arrived too late for inclusion in this issue, expect a review next month. If **Edge** finds the inordinate amount of time required to complete it.

(PC) Interplay

Metropolis Street Racer

Due for review this issue, submission code was delayed until September 22, making an appearance this month an impossibility. A little while longer, then.

(DC) Sega

Street Fighter III Double Impact

Despite having arrived but a few months ago, certain team members feel they've got what it takes to beat the more established crew. Ah, the innocence of youth.

(DC) Capcom

Final fantasies?

Revisiting the controversy of the sequel

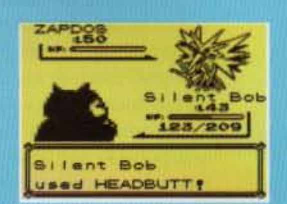
Given the frequency at which they're being pumped out nowadays, it's little wonder there's general apathy towards sequels right now, and Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi recently declared the industry in a state of crisis.

If Yamauchi-san feels he can launch his habitual assault on his fellow competitors, it's because he enjoys a privileged position when it comes to this particular issue. Of course, Nintendo releases follow-ups to its games – some of its best creations have had predecessors – but it doesn't necessarily adhere to the yearly update model that many others have greedily fallen in love with. Naturally, simplistic titles such as *Pokémon* (below), which can be reasonably improved within a brief time frame, are released far more frequently than something like a *Zelda* or a *Mario*. Part of the reason lies in the fact that the latter are hugely complex titles, but it's also because Nintendo refuses to release cheap updates of its most prestigious brands, because it quickly realised that such a business model wouldn't do it any favours in the long run (as Square is currently discovering).

For instance, could you envisage Sony, Eidos or Electronic Arts skipping an entire hardware generation with something as universally acclaimed as Nintendo's *Metroid* series? Had anyone else held the intellectual property, it would have been turned into a cash cow many moons ago.

Edge's attitude to sequels is pretty clear. In an ideal world, every game would be a unique creation in terms of genre, graphic quality, audio achievement, playability and overall execution. But as videogaming pushes further into the mainstream, repackaging and reselling will only become more common. Provided the repackaging is executed comprehensively – which is to say not only are the original title's faults addressed but additional features are incorporated and new gameplay aspects introduced – then **Edge** has little problem in scoring a sequel higher than its predecessor.

There is, of course, no set timescale for sequels to follow up the original template. Take this month's *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* and *Speedball 2100*, for example. Only a year may have passed, but be it from a technical or gameplay aspect, everything in the former has been upgraded: the premise remains the same, but the game has evolved. Whereas, regrettably, the latter is a clear indication that a gap of a significant number of years between original and sequel doesn't necessarily guarantee a successful venture.



X-Fire

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **EA** Developer: **EA Square** Price: **¥6,800 (£45)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

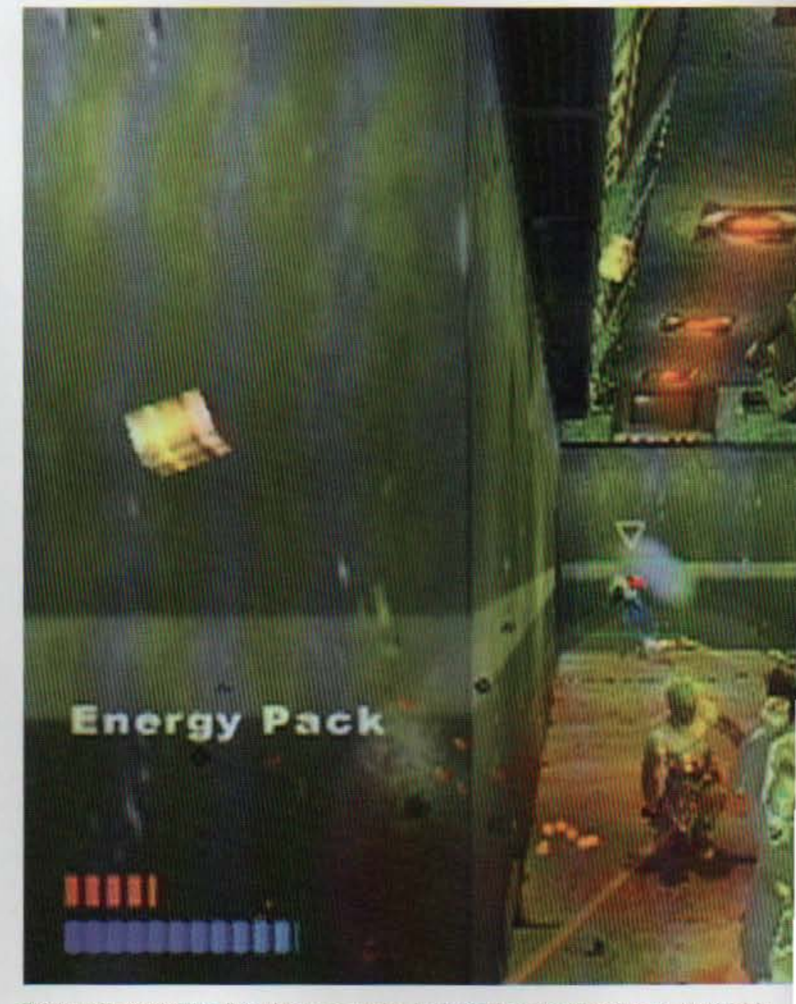
Do your best to ignore the first two levels of *X-Fire*. The first, which serves as a Training mode, could just as easily be marketed as a new cure for insomnia, whereas someone clearly forgot to inform the designers of the second that the game had already begun. You'll have to play through them, of course, but resist the temptation to witness the PS2's feeble disc tray in action for 30-odd minutes and you'll soon be indulging in a far more substantial gaming experience. Only by the third stage do things heat up and become indicative of what's to come. Inevitably – and understandably – many will have given up by this point, which is a shame considering *X-Fire*'s strengths.

Charge into a room and you find yourself the target of a perplexing number of gun barrels, resulting in wonderfully chaotic situations

Characters are limited to how much weight they can carry – as such, it's a good idea to let the big boys carry the big guns. Futuristic gun alert (above)

The game's advantage over superior genre stablemates such as *Syphon Filter 2*, for instance, is the introduction of squad-based combat. For most of the levels you begin with three companions (two have a habit of momentarily leaving your side to pursue their part of the mission, but they usually return in time for the end-of-level boss showdown). Your control over comrades extends to an assortment of orders, including engage the enemy, provide cover, or retreat to a pre-established point, for instance. There are a few more, but the selection isn't huge. More importantly, because everything in the import version of *X-Fire* is in Japanese (either written or spoken), a fair amount of experimentation is required to determine the various functions.

Working out what to do during the actual missions, however, is a far simpler process courtesy of the game's structure. Moving from one level to the next involves shooting down a number of enemy soldiers and releasing the locks on certain doors by way of flicking switches. Thankfully, the latter are never located at the opposite end of the map from the door they unlock in the way usually shamelessly exploited by developers looking to extend longevity (in fact some are so near to the door as to make them redundant). But other than locked doors and a few lifts, the game has little to hide its linearity.

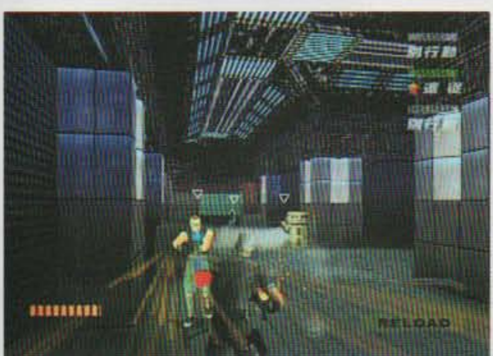


The control method takes a little while to get used to, but it soon becomes second nature. It's certainly not as floaty as it initially appears, and the auto-aim feature proves invaluable during play (see box)

At least the combat is successfully conveyed. Charge headlong into a room and, more often than not, you find yourself the target of a perplexing number of gun barrels, resulting in wonderfully chaotic situations. A more cautious approach, utilising the various environmental objects as cover, or even letting members of your troupe redress the balance somewhat, is usually a better tactical move. As is the correct tool for the job. The 17-weapon selection covers all your ballistic and pyrotechnical needs – you can purchase armaments (as well as health and shield energy packs and other equipment) before the beginning of a new mission with currency you earn from your previous sortie. The further you get in the game, more models become available. The tactical allocation of arms, ammunition and energy packs is down to you.

Part of the illusion of realistic combat (or Hollywood's vision of it, at least) is the AI. While your team members could get a little more involved, opponents use the environment surprisingly well, hiding behind obstacles and taking crafty pot shots, or retreating if outnumbered.

Less satisfying is the look of the title, which in most instances offers a visual quality little more than polished PS1 graphics. More importantly, there isn't really enough variety in the missions, and concepts such as the door switches are



A restorable shield (blue bar) protects you for several hits before your health bar (orange) is also affected

While the graphics are nothing to shout about, the sound effects are far more effective. When combined with how your victims react to being lacerated by whizzing lead, the result is worryingly satisfying

One of the end-of-level bosses faces the sheer determination of your squad (above). Much of the game exudes a gloomy, sombre feel, though this invariably helps set the atmosphere. A little colour now and again wouldn't hurt, however

repetitive and underdeveloped. More puzzling situations requiring genuine brain power would have been preferable, but probably too much to ask from an EA game – a company that, after all, makes its living from targeting the massmarket, hence the lowest common denominator. As such, *X-Fire* remains an enjoyable, solid rental proposition.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Stay on target

Often the problem with thirdperson action games involving weapons is the fact that you spend more time attempting to target enemies than actually shooting them. This is fine if there are small numbers of them and they're standing a reasonable distance directly in front of you, not so dandy if there are eight firing from all directions – devote too much time to aiming, and you'll be lucky to get to shoot more than two baddies. To combat this, EA Square has implemented an auto-aim function. Should your sight wander near a gun-toting fiend, it will lock on to them unless you decisively turn away from said foe. In practice, it's not as intrusive as it sounds – without it, *X-Fire* would be virtually unplayable.

Armored Core 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **From Software** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£45)** Release: **Out now (Japan) November 24 (UK)**

With customisation forming a large part of the game – and essential preparation for any sortie – an intuitive interface is crucial in order to retain a degree of accessibility

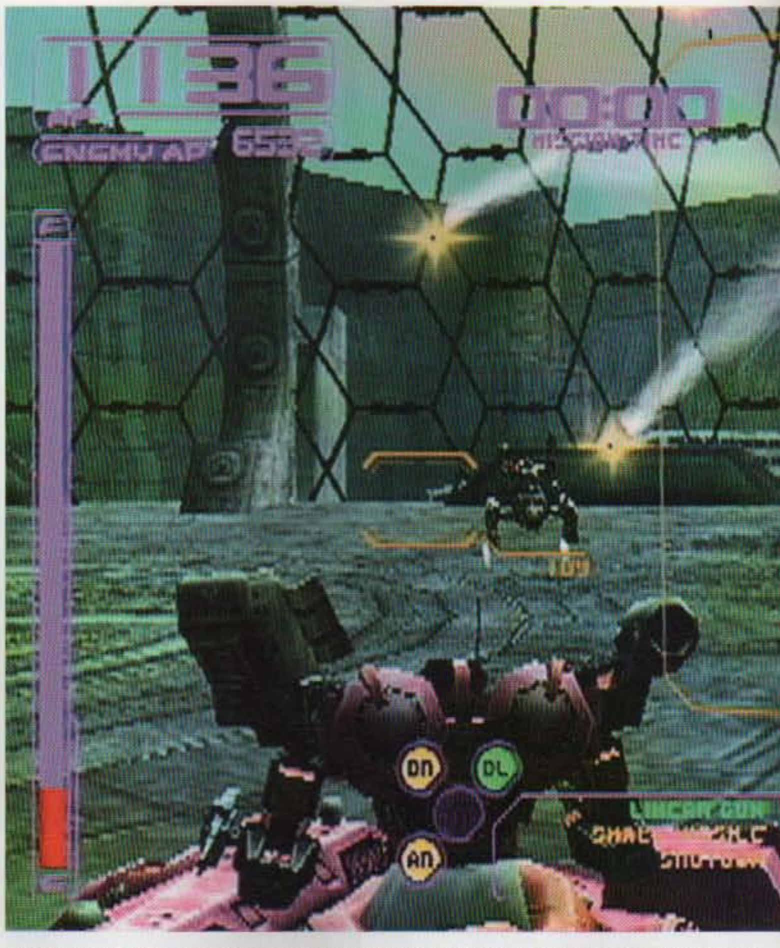
Come the European launch of PlayStation2 there will be a number of software titles vying with each other and an extensive catalogue of DVD movies for the attention of consumers who have been lucky enough to secure a preorder. Although *Armored Core 2* will be nestled among them, it is unlikely at first glance to divert attention from the superficial charms of well-established franchises like *Ridge Racer* and *Tekken*. Indeed, the introductory mission – which must be completed before the game can be fully explored – does little to hint at the vast complexity on offer.

The structure of the game proper, on the other hand, does give some indication of the game's strengths. An Arena mode offers the player the chance to take on a succession of 50 opponents in order to ascend a tournament ladder. The ensuing bouts offer a relatively simple drama compared to the likes of *Virtual On*, but one that is compelling nonetheless, and more so in multiplayer. While the amount of slowdown experienced in splitscreen would suggest this was tacked on at the end of development, a cable-link head-to-head mode offers an alternative means to take on human opponents.

The real meat of the game lies in the Mission mode. Composed of a forking structure, the missions accepted early in the game shape the nature of engagements later on, and at first there is an almost bewildering choice of assignments on offer. From disposing of bombs within a time limit, through straightforward head-on clashes, to the retrieval of sensitive objects while under fire, each requires a variety of playing styles, and, more importantly, military hardware.

Armored Core 2 has taken the lofty designs of its 32bit predecessor and exploited the capacities of PlayStation2 to properly fulfil them

There is a mission early in the game in which the starting Armored Core must be almost rebuilt from scratch to meet the objective of chasing a fast-moving vehicle. Credit earned in the Arena and from missions can be used to purchase new parts to improve the performance. Such enhancement is at the heart of the game, simply because there is no single way to construct an all-conquering mech. *Armored Core 2* can seem immensely challenging if inadequate attention is paid to preparation for combat. A series of lightly armoured but agile aircraft can be easily seen off with a machine-gun, for example, but a grenade launcher is wholly unsuited to the task. Conversely, slow-moving but heavily armoured sentries are perfect fodder for such a weapon. The complex catalogue of parts – each defined by a series of statistics – is rendered intelligible by an interface that makes it obvious what the advantages of new items are, and gives the player a chance to test the results of their mechanical ingenuity before proceeding to real episodes of combat. As the player progresses to the summit of the arena ladder, opposing mechs give revealing glimpses into alternative playing styles and suggest alternative payloads. Given the number of items that can be customised – head, arms, legs, booster, power source and the Armored Core itself among them – it must have been a gargantuan task balancing this game, but one that has been consummately pulled off. The scale of customisation that can be undertaken, and the immediate impact on gameplay, is the crux of the game, and immensely enjoyable.



The Arena mode (above) is a challenge in its own right, but an excellent replay function also turns it into a learning experience. The tactics and weaponry employed by opponents often give pause for thought

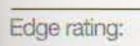
Nevertheless, there are drawbacks. Controls are initially tricky when compared to the simple fluidity of *Gungriffon Blaze*, but this actually increases the sensation of piloting a large cumbersome robotic suit of armour, and there is the option to reconfigure. Likewise, the fact that cut-scenes can't be skipped is offset by the fact that, certainly early in the game, the player isn't obliged to successfully complete every mission in order to progress. No, the biggest disappointment is that the game makes no use of the much-

In addition to bipedal legs, there are a number of alternative methods of movement in the game, each with its own advantages and disadvantages

Even the HUD can be adjusted, showing as much information as is necessary, in a choice of colours

vaunted procedural capabilities of the PS2 hardware. Some missions take place over large areas and winding indoor complexes, but there is an arbitrary delineation of playing areas. Failing a mission or getting beaten by an opponent in an arena because of straying the wrong side of a boundary that is only depicted on radar detracts from the sense of freedom that the game engenders. But this is just nit-picking.

Armored Core 2 has taken the lofty designs of its 32bit predecessor and exploited the capacities of PS2 to properly fulfil them, resulting in a title that should persuade anybody that still needs convincing of the merits of both the platform and, indeed, the robot combat genre.



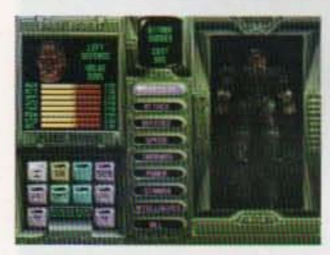
Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Playing at politics

Missions take place against a plot that is composed of the complex political manoeuvrings by several groups that are struggling to seize control of Mars. As a Raven, the player takes on missions from the likes of Zio Corporation, Emeraude, and the LCC, which lends some element of morality to proceedings – do you pick missions at random, for example, with no regard for the implications? Do you assist Emeraude in its insidious corporate schemings? Or do you help the LCC return the planet to the rule of law?

Speedball 2100

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Empire Interactive** Developer: **Bitmap Brothers** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**



Management and training is executed through the familiar menu system. Statistics can now be called up during play, and opposing players compared

Ten years ago, in a fast-maturing software world that was already beginning to become corporately formulaic, the Bitmap Brothers stood out. Each of the developer's games oozed an inimitable in-house style, making them instantly recognisable. 1990's *Speedball 2* represented the company's peak, creating a stylised, ultra-violent, fast-paced future sport that was to captivate the 16bit audience. *Speedball 2100* arrives on the PlayStation almost exactly a decade later, a generation's expectations loaded on its steel-clad shoulders.

Taking control of the worst Speedball team in the league, Brutal Deluxe, your task is to claim overall victory in three competitions – Knockout, League, and Cup – over three difficulty levels. Despite the game's inherent lack of complexity, winning a tournament takes forever, thanks to the sheer number of matches involved. Regardless, the frustratingly repetitive grind of the oneplayer mode pales next to the cold fury of twoplayer competition. It's here that *Speedball 2100* recaptures some of the original's spirit, thanks to the fact that the clean game dynamic has been all but cloned.

The action takes the form of a football/pinball crossbreed: points are scored by scoring goals, hitting targets, or knocking out opponents. Power-ups, cash, and equipment litter the arena and serve as secondary goals for your ten-man team. Post-match, the money collected can be spent on upgrading your players' statistics, or buying someone new from the overly simplistic transfer market. In the oneplayer game this serves as an opportunity to take advantage of all the weaknesses of the game's AI, as you can buy one good player and watch him overwhelm all but the strongest opponents. But, just as in *Speedball 2*, being faced with a human opponent trying the same tricks means things are more balanced in twoplayer mode.

What lifted *Speedball 2* into the realms of genius was its tongue-in-cheek cartoon chic, but that has been diluted and the impact lost

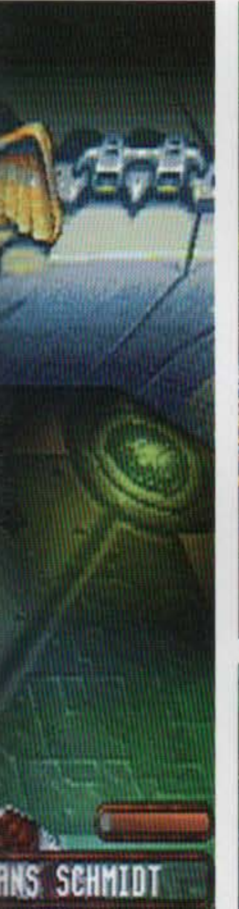
Something may have become apparent by now: *Speedball 2100* is a polygon photocopy of the original. The characterised bitmaps that made up Brutal Deluxe, Super Nashwan, Fatal Justice et al have been stretched over angular polyhedral skulls, producing as close to a three-dimensional recreation of the characters as the technology is capable of. The character animations are the same, too: sliding, jumping, the celebration knee-slide and wiggle – all distinctive features of the Amiga and ST versions. Indeed, the end result is almost as good as the original.

Though *Speedball 2100*'s arenas have varying designs carved into their metal, the layout remains the same as in the 1990 release, as do the angles from which targets can be struck and points scored

One of the benefits of a full 3D engine is that the camera can be placed anywhere, so it's a little puzzling that *Speedball 2100* lets you lock the lens at only three heights. If you accept that perhaps the game wouldn't be playable at any other angle than top-down, why isn't the engine at least used to provide the goal replays at different angles? Since the game dynamic is identical to the previous release, it's still effectively a two-dimensional sport. The ball can either be at one of two discrete heights – on the ground or in the air – as can the player. There's no real depth, so what's the point? These are polygons rendered simply for the sake of it, and the fact that all they bring to game is a slightly more generic look is damning.

What lifted *Speedball 2* into the realms of genius was its tongue-in-cheek cartoon chic, but that's been diluted so effectively that all the impact is lost. This looks like any other PlayStation game, and plays likes you'd expect a ten-year-old classic to play – retrogaming at its finest, but still a ghost of the initial experience. This isn't the resurrection of the Bitmaps' style-and-substance policy gamers were hoping for. It's more like a wake.

Edge rating: Four out of ten



Rather than reappearing on a revolving steel plate at the start of each half, the ball is launched straight up from the centre of the pitch and falls to a random position within the centre circle. Players enter the field of play to sweeping spotlights, but leave (when injured) at the hands of the same medical robots which carried them from the pitch ten years ago

Speedball slowdown

Speedball 2100 is a far better-looking game at the highest camera setting, and given that this also allows you to see more of the field of play, it ought to be the mode of choice for most players. But, thanks to the number of polygons onscreen, the occasional bout of slowdown occurs – almost unforgivable given the game's name and that its main strength is its fast pace.

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Neversoft** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

The taxi cabs of the original game have been replaced with a host of new vehicles from the camper van to the Greyhound. Which obviously does a fair bit of damage when it runs over your board

Signing Neversoft has proved an astute decision by Activision. Last year's huge hit, *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding*, generated phenomenal amounts of capital, secured them one of the most flexible game engines in existence and opened up the lucrative world of extreme sports to publishers. It was inevitable that there'd be a sequel, but the question was, given the technical limitations of PlayStation, how could the game be improved?

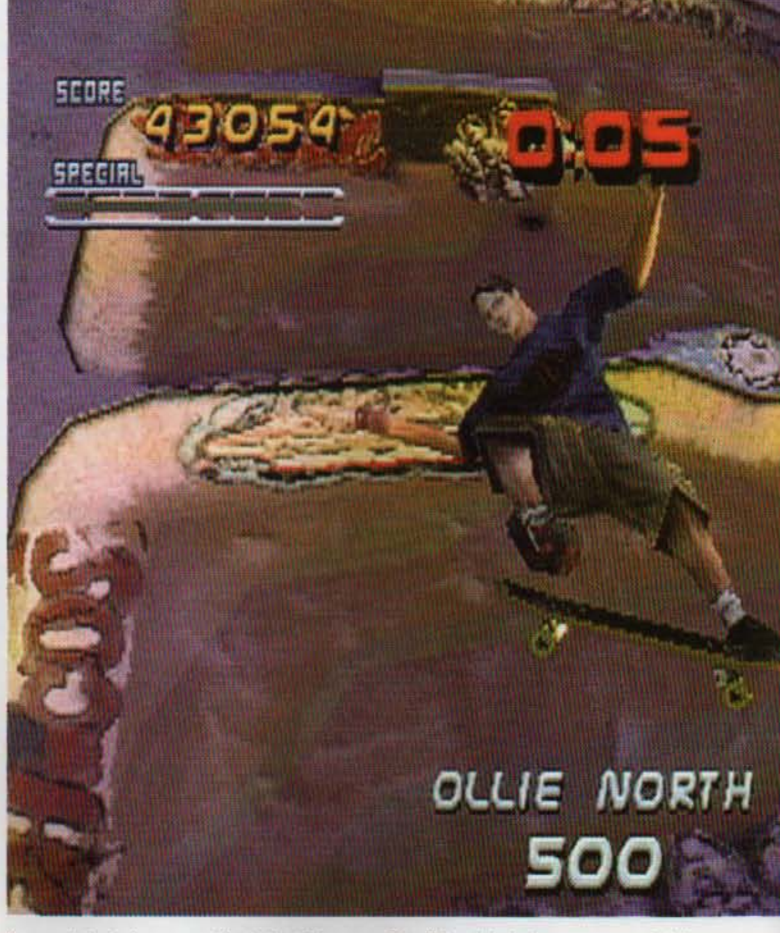
Neversoft's approach will surprise those who were expecting the usual sequel stalwarts of more tracks, more skaters and more skate punk on the soundtrack – although these are included. While the concept remains the same (ride skateboard, perform tricks), the developer has ramped up the gameplay and focused on making a game with a lifespan that goes beyond the looming shadow of PS2.

Frantic button bashing was never the way to go about succeeding in *Tony Hawk's*, and its sequel is no different. If anything, it demands even more precision from your joypad taps. In the first game you could plough through a few levels before reaching a glass ceiling that entailed hours of practice to shatter. This instalment seems to have had the ceiling installed on every level.

Rather than use a points system to open new courses, the game now revolves around collecting cash. The more targets you achieve in each arena, the more money you accrue in your career bank. Cash buys you entry to the next level of your career, but you can spend your hard-earned at any stage – not just on boards and skate stats, but on entire trick sets, opening up new stunt possibilities. There's now an element of strategy about how you mould each skater's career. Should you pile all the money into his ollie statistic, or splash out on a new trick for a competition? Upon such decisions success or failure hangs.

Rather than a points system, the game now revolves around collecting cash. The more targets you achieve, the more you accrue

The levels are as cunningly designed as the first game, with everything from Mullet Falls to Venice Beach and beyond included, but they benefit from being considerably larger, although you wouldn't necessarily know this at the outset of each level. Skating round on the first recce you'll spot stray $50 bills up on sections of rooftop that are seemingly inaccessible, but as you get better at pulling off combinations of tricks they gradually become viable cash pick-ups and open new areas that are effectively mini levels themselves. A good example of this is in New York, where collecting five subway tokens opens up the tube tracks and the option to grind along the rails into a whole new skate park.

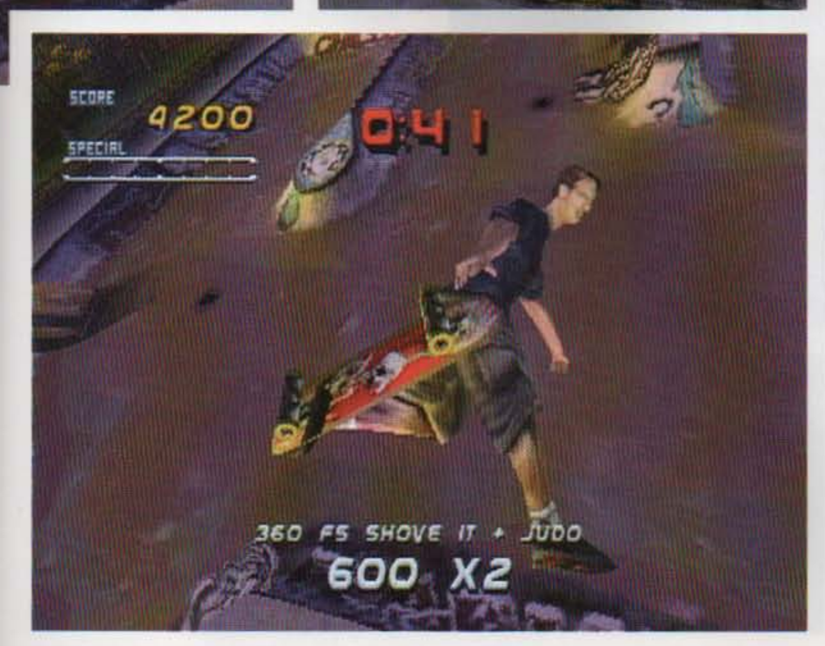


Yes, wordplay's always an option in the trick names. But all the tricks in the game are real tricks designed, performed, and – ultimately – named by bona fide professional skaters. So blame them

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 is all about extending game content, and the inclusion of a comprehensive skate park editor reinforces this push, enabling you to drop battered taxis, high rails and half pipes into your preferred position inside a huge warehouse. Crucially, this makes the game limited only by your own imagination.

Graphically, the engine has been pushed as far as it can go. New bail animations have been put in which provide elements of black comedy when your chosen skater lands straddling a steel rail, but the title remains guilty of the fogging that was a trademark of the original. In context, this remains a minor quibble, as there's a limit to the processing power of PlayStation and Neversoft wisely hasn't attempted to make a beautiful game, but instead attempted to deliver a bigger, better, but similarly addictive title as its predecessor. It has succeeded.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



Action that would otherwise be apparently physically impossible is entirely the norm for Tony Hawk. The man himself claims to be able to perform ever trick in the game, a claim of killer proportions

In among the traditional elements of the skate park editor, such as pipes and bowls, you'll find the delights of the skewer pit, which certainly serves to focus your mind on the job at hand

Reading the manual finally pays off

Manuals are one of the key ways in which *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*'s gameplay is more open than that of the first game. Flick up on the joypad and your skater balances gingerly on the nose of his board, reverse wheelieing along the floor. But manuals come into their own when used to link tricks, in a similar way to grinds in the first game, only more flexible. In theory, with enough skill a competition run could consist of just one huge combined trick, shooting your points tally into the millions.

Dynasty Warriors 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Midas Interactive** Developer: **Koei** Price: **£45** Release: **November 26**

Horses can be commandeered on some stages and offer height advantage and protection. With some practice it is possible to wreak complete havoc by trampling enemies into the ground

The lighting effects are tremendous, although the PS2 shows serious signs of slowdown when the action become cluttered. Stages can take up to an hour to complete, and each character can access eight levels

Digging in the crates

Several power-ups are available, either by destroying crates or defeating opposition leaders. The most important are the garlic cloves (for extra health) and the Musou vases (for your special attack). Cleverly, the Musou gauge recharges very quickly when your health is precariously low, giving you a fighting chance of staying alive. Although the Musou attack can take out a massive number of opponents, enemy generals will recover full health if they are merely knocked out. They must be defeated with a steady onslaught of standard attacks.

The costumes, weapons and aesthetic mood of *Dynasty Warriors 2* are all Japanese, but anyone familiar with *Gauntlet* will feel right at home with Koei's battle epic. The move from an overhead perspective where enemies politely queue up to be slain to full free-roaming 3D environments has been handled tremendously well. Having to remain alert to attacks from all quarters heightens the tension, and arguably ushers in a new paradigm in the hack-and-slash genre.

Your task is to take up the struggle between two warring dynasties in ancient Japan. Nine heroes with different weapons and abilities are selectable at the start (although 20 more can be unlocked), and both Campaign and Free modes are offered. In the latter, stages which are unlocked in Campaign mode can be accessed directly. Each stage holds up to 1,000 enemies, and given that your own force enters the fray and registers kills, it is possible to clock up a body count of 900-plus on a level. While you would expect this to get tiresome, there are enough subtleties to keep the player interested.

Chief among these is the fact that your actions affect both the morale and behaviour of your allied troops. It is all too easy to be distracted by your own heroics, allow the red mist to descend, and pile into the enemy ranks for half an hour, neglecting to notice that a rearguard action is decimating your army at the opposite end of the map. Plugging gaps and charging once more unto the breach are both necessary if progress is to be made.

The interface is simple, but suits the feel of the game perfectly. There is an attack button, a block button, and a special Musou (berserk) surge. Perform a series of standard slashes and it is possible to hit four or five adversaries. However, should things become crowded and you find yourself surrounded by a score of foes, it is usually prudent to launch the Musou attack. Finishing off a throng of misguided warrior peasants at a stroke is a gratifying experience rarely delivered in any fighting game. Searching out such throngs of enemies eventually turns into an obsession.

What makes *Dynasty Warriors 2* really special is the way in which the epic scope of war is communicated. Archers, generals, heroes and sub-bosses fight on both sides. Slaughtering the enemy bosses and heroes while employing strategies to protect yours mitigates for the limited hack and slashery of the game mechanics.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Gungriffon Blaze

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **Game Arts** Price: **¥6,800 (£45)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

The third instalment in the series and the first to be published on a system not manufactured by Sega, *Gungriffon Blaze* is set two years after *Gungriffon Blaze II*, in 2017. After the world approaches a second power struggle that threatens nuclear holocaust, Japan (one of the three governments involved) decides to send in mecha armies as a way of restoring peace.

There's an undeniable emphasis on plot here that is sadly wasted on anyone without knowledge of Japanese. In fact, unlike *Armored Core 2*, there's surprisingly little English text throughout the game, which makes some of the weapon selection a little hit and miss. Mission objectives, which are detailed using animated maps, remain largely unaffected – you'll rapidly work out what's required of you. Set in international hotspots Greece, Egypt, Florida, Tibet, Guam (the training level), and the Ukraine, the six levels are pleasingly extensive, requiring you to raid or eradicate enemy bases, protect supply lines, and even destroy the Space Shuttle.

The game's lack of levels is partially countered by score and experience points gained in combat, which subsequently unlock new weapons, power-ups, new mecha and, crucially, alternative battle scenarios. This doesn't beat having entirely new levels, of course, but it's more of an incentive than you'd initially give it credit for.

Regardless of the mission objective, however, chances are you have little choice but to blow plenty of enemy units – be they tanks, mecha, heavy mecha, helicopters, gun turrets – into shrapnel. Thankfully, this is immensely enjoyable. *Blaze*'s primary strength is in the way it conveys a real sense of battle with sufficiently advanced AI so as to ensure some of your fellow HIGH-MACS III pilots are still helping you out near the end of the mission, rather than lying scattered across no-man's land. Pleasing, too, is the way most objects are destructible, enabling you to alternate your strategy should things not be going entirely according to plan. There's an enemy mecha sniping from the inside of an aircraft hangar? Shoot the structure down and watch the collapsing roof crush your opponent out of action.

Ultimately, while it lacks *Armored Core 2*'s impressive comprehensiveness and fails to match it in terms of longevity, *Gungriffon Blaze* manages to provide an engrossing experience of its own.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

The game is played entirely in firstperson mode, and in true mecha style, you can fly around for limited amount of time (above)

Each of the missions finishes when either you complete it successfully, the time limit runs out, or (amazingly) your health bar is depleted

Mainstream mecha

While Blaze isn't visually or technically astounding, only now are developers finding the power to create mecha games with graphically rich, destructible environments and complement these with decent AI, as a way of capturing the mainstream gaming crowd. It works.

Ultimate Fighting Championship

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Crave** Developer: **Anchor** Price: **$55 (£39)** Release: **Out now (US) October (UK)**

The violent nature of the championship is accurately reproduced, but with none of the severe bruising that inevitably accompanies it

Surprisingly, the level of plasma in the game is minimal, even when set to maximum. For such a bloodthirsty title, you would expect proceedings to feature a good deal more claret being spilt

Attack speed

While it is usual for the wrestling genre to falter under its own leaden pace and cardboard animation, *UFC* excels in both these areas by delivering a well-paced and lifelike representation of the sport. Protagonists are afforded virtually human reaction speeds, thus the overall feeling of swift, merciless bouts is amplified considerably over its lesser cousins.

In a world of finely tuned brawlers, it is point for debate whether the wrestling genre will ever achieve a level of importance that affords it serious consideration. Where fighting games have broadened and matured, the comparative likes of both the WWF and WCW franchises fall woefully short of what could be considered substantial. *Ultimate Fighting Championship* goes some way to bolstering this deficiency, but offers up a dichotomy in the form of its slick, fast portrayal of a brutal sport that itself singularly fails to excite.

From the outset, there appears to be no element missing; options for Training, Career, Tournament and Exhibition modes provide a number of paths to the championship, while the opportunity to cultivate a home-grown protagonist also exists, albeit in somewhat limited form. Anchor has taken the time to flesh out the fighters, as they resemble their real-life counterparts very closely, both in physical terms and in the way they move. Indeed, the fighters' attacks are swift and ferocious, with a typical bout lasting no more than 30 seconds, given the human body's inability to withstand repeated pummelling.

Adopting the *Tekken* approach, each of the four Dreamcast buttons controls a different limb, allowing various strike combinations in addition to grapples, throws and holds. Two bars measure the character's life and stamina, the latter's depletion resulting in slower, less potent manoeuvres.

While technically proficient, *Ultimate Fighting Championship* is bereft of any sense of engagement or challenge, and where the developer claims a vast raft of moves, it soon becomes apparent that a few kicks and punches are sufficient to fell most opponents inside the half-minute mark. The fact that this can be executed in a flamboyant, theatrical way is irrelevant, as the real-life championship thrives on a vicious bloodlust, and not the acrobatic impossibilities prevalent in the likes of *Dead or Alive 2*.

Lacking in the humour of WWF's absurd pantomime, Crave's title occupies an alien middle ground that can be difficult to digest, and even with its supposed plethora of moves, it is hard to develop any attachment. While it's obvious why shortsighted codeshops will never go wrong appealing to the lowest common denominator, you have to wonder whether titles based on moral ground as shaky as this are actually worthy of featuring anything innovative anyway.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

Star Trek: Voyager – Elite Force

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Raven Software** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Ever since Leonard Nimoy first donned a pair of prosthetic ears, 'Star Trek' fans have been willing to take the leap of faith required to believe that – for example – a clumsy actor in a rubber suit poses a significant threat to their heroes. Whether gamers will be quite so prepared to believe that the Borg will provide them with an adequate challenge in the context of a firstperson shooter is quite another question.

However, this hasn't deterred Raven to ostensibly start the action in *Elite Force* with the player taking on the role of Ensign Alex (or Alexandria) Munro as she infiltrates a Borg cube. The resourcefulness with which this lumbering enemy is adapted to a fundamentally different medium is typical of the care lavished on this game. Faster on their feet than celluloid impressions convey, the Borg teleport into battle and attack in numbers. They are also capable of adapting to your initial weaponry, and in later levels acquire long-range attacks.

The Borg are not the only highlight. The starship graveyard the action is set in provides the pretext for later levels to include several alien races, and missions demand different playing styles. From routine ship maintenance to traversing the low-gravity confines of an alien vessel, players are kept on their toes, and holodeck training missions introduce fantastically varied environments.

The underlying *Quake III Arena* engine results in some stunning graphics, but has also enabled the developer to include a comprehensive multiplayer mode. By tweaking the gameplay dynamics of the oneplayer game, balance is maintained, and the introduction of power-ups results in this aspect of the game being almost as comprehensive as *Quake III Arena* itself – albeit with an element of continuity confusion, thanks to the every-man-for-himself mayhem that ensues. Levels are as well designed as in the oneplayer missions, with small maps resulting in quick, brutal encounters, while larger areas provide testing encounters with bots demonstrating considerable AI.

The only accusations that can reasonably be levelled at *Elite Force* are that it's too easy and that it doesn't represent a groundbreaking new paradigm for the genre. Nevertheless, it builds on the existing formula and offers such a comprehensive experience that the result is an accomplished title that assuredly interprets the licence.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

'Star Trek' is hardly known for its weapons, but owing to alien technology, the selection in *Elite Force* is hugely satisfying. The obligatory sniper mode is, of course, featured in the game

Sidekicks are implemented surprisingly well in the missions in which they are featured, adding more firepower and technological knowhow

The technology of teleportation will keep players on their toes by providing a rationale for countless waves of attackers. Fortunately there are plenty of health and ammo power-up points dotted around the levels

An element of variety

Although *Star Trek: Voyager – Elite Force* is no *Deus Ex*, there are one or two moments in the game when the player is given a choice, including one episode aboard a Borg cube in which early decisive action can eliminate a greater end-of-level threat. Other alien races include the Etherians – a giant moth-like race – and Scavengers composed of Klingons and humans, each of whom have their own weapon technology that becomes available to players throughout the course of the game.

Surfroid

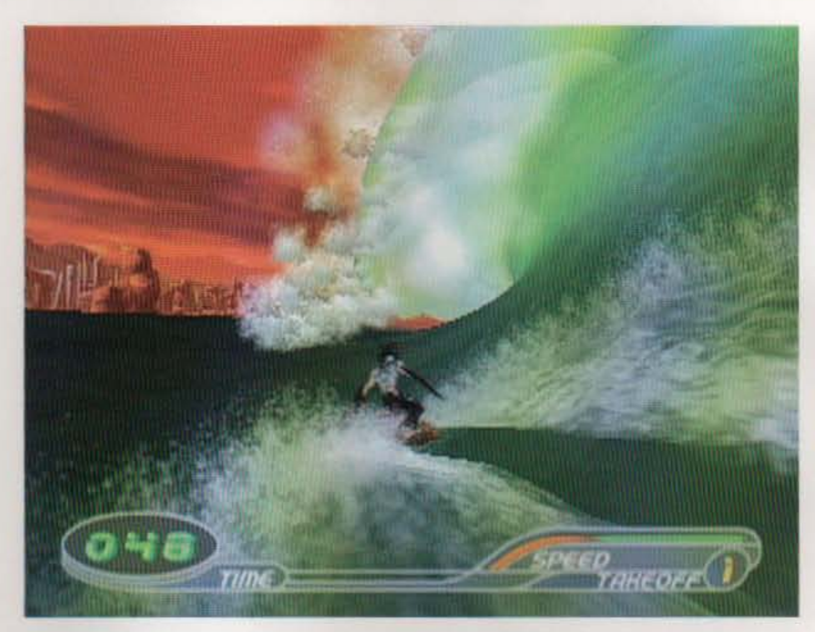
Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **ASCII** Developer: **Opus** Price: **¥6,800 (£45)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

The most striking thing about *Surfroid* is the fact the game is packed with its own plastic surfboard to attach over the Dual Shock 2's analogue sticks. In practice it works well, provided you're reasonably gentle with it (any brusque movement and the rubber cups are likely to let go of the sticks).

Select one of the six initially available surfers (new characters appear every time you clear a difficulty setting), and get through the levels by acquiring enough points to clear them. This is done by collecting mine-like items that are found floating around, but those prepared to carve up the face of the wave and take to the air are rewarded with big scores. All characters share a basic trick repertoire which is complemented by a surfer's personal special move.

Once you get used to controlling the board it's mildly diverting stuff, particularly when you face the huge waves of the later levels, but *Surfroid* looks and feels rather rough around the edges. You're likely to be compelled to finish the game to see how ludicrous the surfing conditions can become, but chances are the game's technical and gameplay limitations will ensure you don't return to it too often.

Edge rating: Four out of ten



As the waves increase in size, the game becomes more fun – turn in to the tube for added pressure, particularly when you're dealing with a 30-metre monster. Sadly, control and technical issues spoil things

Tricks (top) are initially fiddly to pull off – you're never quite sure whether, after carving your way up the wave, you'll take off or pull out. They're easy points, though

Muppet Monster Adventure

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Midway** Developer: **Traveller's Tales** Price: **£30** Release: **October 25**

Enemies can be destroyed in two ways: either with a spin attack, or a laser from Robin's robotic hand. Both are short-range attacks, but often only one will be effective against a particular foe

If you ever doubted *Muppet*'s genre, it reaffirms its platform status with a lava-based level. Pressing a button in mid-air will give Robin batwings, allowing gliding

When something's this generic, it has to be near-flawless. Arch-muppet Kermit's nephew, Robin, bounds across hallucinogenic 3D worlds, dispatching foes with a short-range raygun and a lethal spinning attack. Diamonds, scattered across the landscapes, are sought and further levels become available when the collection count reaches certain targets.

Diversions from the standard platform fare come often. At certain points in the game, illustrated by the appearance of tokens in the top-right of the screen, Robin can morph to gain extra abilities – flight, swimming, climbing, and a Miss Piggy karate chop. Sub-games are neat and varied, despite adding to the overall feel that *Muppet Monster Adventure* is nothing more than a Muppet fan's tribute to *Mario 64*.

Though previous attempts to replicate Mario's universe have been destroyed by bad chase-camera code, the robust camerawork here proves a smart enough metaphor for the game: it's solid, dependable, and avoids the traps its competitors stumble into. The game itself does nothing more than you'd expect, but it does it flawlessly and is competent enough to be a considered purchase for fans of the genre.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Cool Cool Toon

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **SNK** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥3,800 (£25)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Level breaks, where your hero will Flitz without help, provide brief respite. After hitting around 20 beats in a row, a score-multiplying 'Boon Chance' is available

Your grooving trials lead you to the Flitzing festival, a dance-off in a massive circular arena. Lasers swoop and strobes flash, but it's unlikely you'll notice any of this, such is the concentration required for success

Regular competitors in the rhythm arena won't be surprised at the challenge set here. Success requires negotiating six multi-song levels as either Amp or Spica, children sucked into a cartoon TV world and determined to master 'Flitz' dance moves. Beats represented by ever-decreasing circles descend on coloured points, and the player must use the analogue stick to manoeuvre the cursor to the target before pressing the correct button in time with the tunes. It plays like an ambidextrous *PaRappa*, and looks like a 3D manga dream: bright, striking, and hazily semi-real.

The two difficulty levels are deceivingly titled. Easy isn't easy; though it begins as a fine introduction to *Cool Cool Toon*'s hypnotic dynamic, it soon surpasses the reaction speed needed to complete similar games. Later levels on Normal mode are supremely difficult, requiring more than enough dexterity to silence anyone who would class this as a children's game. For those skilful enough to unlock all 27 characters in Story mode, a five-round 'single Flitz' challenge awaits for each. With oneplayer longevity, an excellent twoplayer mode, and surrealistic beauty, *Cool Cool Toon* excels both creatively and in terms of pure fun.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

TVDJ

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥5,800 (£38)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

'See how cool it is to mix and play the music and visuals', invites the box. Maybe so, but not in this case. A shame, because the concept of film splicing as a game is an interesting with some promise.

The player must fill a series of eight-segment bars by cutting together pieces of video that vary from one to four segments in length. Overlapping the end of a bar, or failing to place the correct piece of video when directed, means restarting that scene, and a lower viewing audience when points are totalled at the end of each film. It also means that the recorded footage won't flow as smoothly – though whether that's noticeable amid the frenetic cutting is questionable.

Graphically, *TVDJ* brings the imagination and style of *Jet Set Radio* to PS2, but, unfortunately, that's all it manages to import. There's no real change of pace or feeling of satisfaction from success, and more time is spent watching the game strut its cel-shaded stuff than directing the action. This may be a budget title with vivid imagery from cartoon heaven, but that's irrelevant when the package is backed up with user participation that's so limited it harks back to the dark days of the interactive movie.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

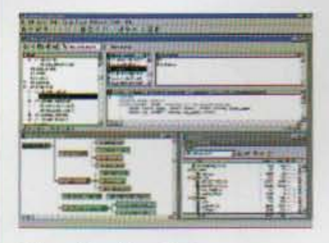
There's no denying *TVDJ*'s cel-shaded good looks, but the paucity of gameplay backing it up reduces it almost to the level of a children's video

As the empty film passes along the bottom of the screen, the player must think quickly and stamp an appropriate length of scene. Mixing different scenes in lots of different combinations gives a high score

CodeWarrior joins the fray

Metrowerks adds PlayStation2 hierarchical profiler to its existing range of toolsets

Metrowerks' field applications engineer Mark Baker



"The profiler allows PS2 programmers to easily find the performance bottleneck in their code," explains Metrowerks' Mark Baker

Considering the rate at which consoles are being announced, re-engineered and released, it's a wonder game developers can keep track of their target platforms. Spare a thought, then, for the tool developers who are expected to support each new console as soon as hardware manufacturers ship the relevant development kits.

Luckily for users of Metrowerks' Integrated Development Environment (IDE) *CodeWarrior*, the fact that GameCube's 'Gekko' CPU is based on Apple's PowerPC architecture means that there won't be a wait for the tools to arrive. The company has a long history of writing Mac compilers. In fact, beta versions of IDE have already been shipped to the first tier of developers and Nintendo used it for the development of GameCube's operating system. A full release will be available when Nintendo starts shipping development hardware.

However, the work on Nintendo's cube hasn't slowed development of the PlayStation2 toolset either. The most recent addition is the hierarchical profiler, which comes combined with a code-coverage tool in a package Metrowerks has labelled *CodeWarrior Analysis Tools* (CATS).

"The profiler allows PS2 programmers to easily find the performance bottlenecks in their code," explains field applications engineer **Mark Baker**. "Using code instrumentation, it automatically adds profiling code to any *CodeWarrior*-compiled program. No special profiling version needs to be compiled and there are no changes to source code."

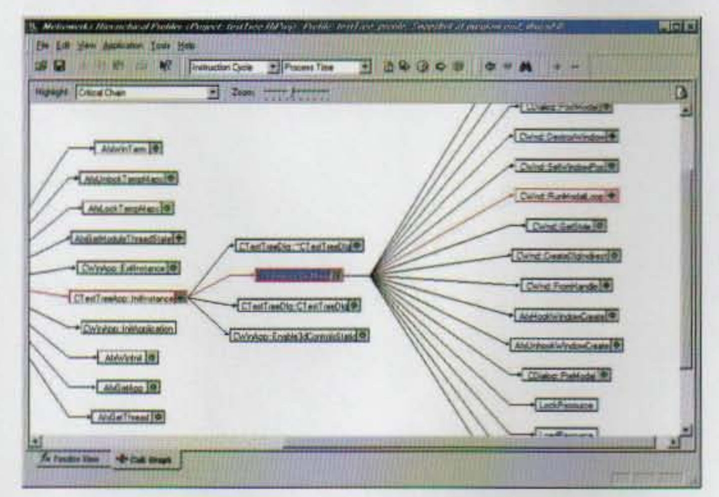
This is important, as it maintains the integrity of the source code and ensures that no additional bugs are added during the debugging process. The profiler shows the time taken by each procedure and line of code in the program in an easy-to-use interface.

Metrowerks is also extending the flexibility of the profiler by releasing a binary code instrumentation toolset. Called *ATOM*, the API comes complete with the source code for sample tools such as cache analysis, performance counter reading and memory tracking.

"Developers can use *ATOM* in two ways," says Baker. "They can create profiling tools that have knowledge about their game, and so can provide more useful information than an off-the-shelf profiler. For example, a developer looking at a collision-detection routine can not only time the routine but see which objects it is processing, giving much more information on how to improve the code."

The other area is for use in debugging. "Some bugs are hard to find because they occur unpredictably or over a long time," Baker explains. "Typically a developer will track down these bugs by adding debugging code to their game. They then have to remember to remove it later – this can add more bugs and takes time. Using the *ATOM* API a developer can add debugging code without affecting their game's source code. Also, because they are writing a tool they can add more code than they would by hand."

The next version of *CodeWarrior, Professional Release 5*, for PC and Mac should be released in the next month, with the improvements then filtering through to the other supported platforms. For those still struggling with Sony's parallel architecture, this will allow programmers to debug more than one CPU simultaneously. "On the PS2, this means debugging the IOP [Input Output Processor] and EE [Emotion Engine] at the same time," Baker explains. "It's vital to be able to debug the communications between the two."



A hierarchical profiler for the PlayStation2 is the latest addition to Metrowerks' *CodeWarrior Analysis Tools*, and comes packaged with a code-coverage tool

URL

www.metrowerks.com/games/
www.metrowerks.com/whitepapers/advantages/
www.codewarrioru.com/CodeWarriorU
www.csl.com/codewarrior

Criterion to offer support

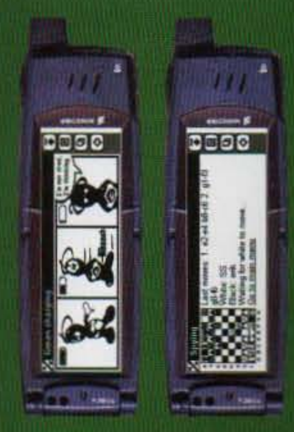
Thanks to Metrowerks' distribution deal, Criterion Software provides both technical and sales support for *CodeWarrior* in Europe.

The current pricing structure sees the *CodeWarrior* IDE/compiler and debugger priced at £3,000 per seat, including 24-hour email support for 12 months. The CATS tools are similarly priced although volume discounts are available at ten per cent for five-seat deals and 15 per cent for 15-seats deals. It is also possible to bundle *CodeWarrior* and Criterion's *RenderWare* package together. The cost of a site licence for the ATOM toolset will be announced soon.

Finding the missing link

Wireless company G-cluster devises mobile gaming server

G-cluster CEO Mika Peltola



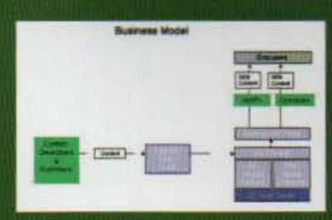
The motif of G-cluster is the G-man (above), who can be integrated into the content on the server

The eureka moment for Finnish wireless company G-cluster came with the realisation that while the Internet was a huge system of content without a billing system, the wireless communications business was a huge billing system without any content. The result is the G-cluster server, a technology the company is promoting as the missing link between mobile game developers and revenue streams.

"The key feature in our platform is that 3D graphics, multiplayer aspects and physical simulation are all handled centrally," explains CEO **Mika Peltola**. This is important as even next-generation mobile phones will be relatively dumb devices, something solved inherently in this server-centric approach which doesn't need them to do much client-side processing.

"Typically, people think mobile gaming is like normal gaming but worse, but if you start centralising features the mobile network can enable entirely new kinds of gaming experiences," Peltola says. "When we talk to developers, they realise they can actually do real stuff even in this medium."

Finnish gamers can experience the most sophisticated mobile chess game in the world now, thanks to a deal with British grandmasters Murray Chandler, Dr John Nunn and developer Bored of Games. Another early coup has been the announcement of a partnership with Demis Hassabis' Elixir Studios. Its first offering, *Assassins*, is expected early next year, although neither side is giving away many details at present. All Peltola will say about the game is "it's quite powerful."



From developer to consumer: G-cluster offers centralised server technology

The first fruits of the Finnish company's deal with Elixir Studios will be a game called *Assassins*, rather than this mock-up of *Republic* running on a G3 phone

G-cluster's first network deal is with Finnish operator Telia, and it is currently in talks with European networks as well. Acting as a link between mobile game developers and network operators, G-cluster will not be visible to consumers, however. Using a business-to-business model, it will cut revenue sharing deals with the operators on behalf of its developers, whose games will be hosted on G-cluster's proprietary server technology.

"We differentiate ourselves on the technology side," Peltola explains, when asked about competing technologies such as Digital Bridge's UNITY server and Nokia's mobile entertainment server (see Codeshop **E**88). "We have hardcore IP already. Our team has been working with these server problems for the last ten years," he continues, pointing out that G-cluster draws its staff from fields as varied as video conferencing, game development, and 3D visual realisation. Incidentally the company's chairman, Jussi Westergren, founded Lateral Logic, which was bought by MathEngine last year.

"Another thing that is important to highlight is that we are not asking people to start developing on new development kit," says Peltola, before adding cryptically, "I'm afraid I can't reveal too many details, but with any luck people are already developing for our platform."

As for the future, Peltola is happy for G-cluster to remain small. "Someone asked us if we were a competitor to Sony PlayStation the other day," he laughs. "Of course, we said that we weren't, but what we can do is help network operators be a threat. Then you're talking about companies with tens of millions of subscribers who have made huge investments in 3G licenses, so being a competitor to Sony may not strike them as being such an odd idea." And considering that Sony Europe has just lost its development director to handset vendor Motorola, Peltola may not be too far from the truth of the matter.

URL
www.g-cluster.com

Benefits of sharing laid bare

Proksim's *Netz* relies on a new distributive approach to online gaming

netZ [Proksim]

URL
www.proksim.com/games/index.html
www.proksim.com/download/NetZ1.0UsersGuide.pdf
www.proksim.com/download/technicaloverview.pdf
www.proksim.com/AtlantisSetup.exe

With the enormous rise in the number of online gamers predicted by the big think-tanks, it's no surprise to see a wealth of technology companies springing up to ease the first steps of these newbie players. One such offering is Proksim's fault-tolerant Internet communications platform, *Netz*. This development toolkit, available for PC and soon for PlayStation2, promises to speed the process of developing online content, as well as improving the quality and speed of the gaming experience.

The core of *Netz* is its C++-like Data Descriptive Language (DDL), used to describe game objects and ensure they are efficiently distributed over the play network. With *Netz*, every game object, such as an NPC, power-up or enemy, is distributed and duplicated to all the devices on which the game is being played. A platform-independent solution, it also means developers can specify the frequency with which datasets, such as the position of objects or the amount of ammunition remaining, are updated depending on their importance. Values such as position can also be extrapolated locally, however, to ensure the efficient use of bandwidth. Built-in bandwidth profiling tools allow the simulation of a wide range of connection types as well as the effects of packet-loss and latency during development.

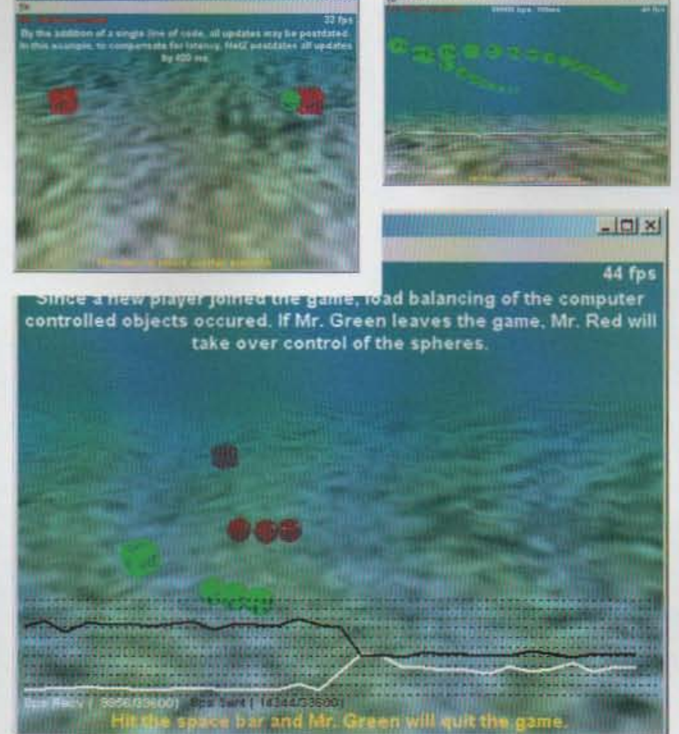
Netz's highly distributive approach is broadly similar to the standard peer-to-peer system, where there is no central server that clients log on to. Once a master object is created and published on one machine it is then duplicated by all the others, ensuring consistency. And while there is a designated game host, it only has the same information as all the other machines.

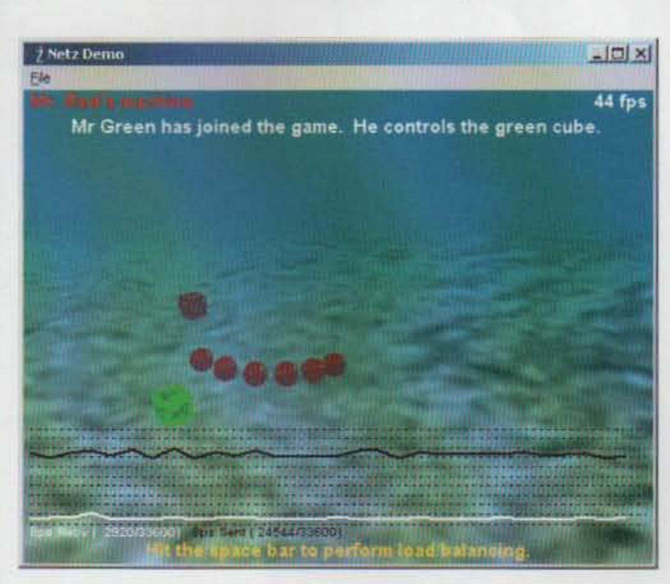
This makes it easier to deal with players joining games mid-session, as someone joining would immediately have all the existing game objects duplicated onto their machine. Conversely, for players leaving mid-game, *Netz* can simply kill all the objects associated with that player. Even if the host leaves or crashes, the game will continue.

This distributed model also means that load balancing can be easily undertaken, as the master objects are spread evenly across all machines. Similarly, if there is a network problem, control of master objects on the affected machine can simply migrate to one of the copies running on another machine.

Testing the link

Originally written for GDC2000, Proksim's *Atlantis* demo proved to be so successful it has since been released as a Web download. A twoplayer game (*Mr Green Vs Mr Red*), it is designed to run over a LAN and demonstrates ten basic scenarios, such as the affect of players dropping out of a game and load balancing. The graph at the bottom of the screen displays the number of bits per second sent and received, while the frame rate is in the top right.





The *Atlantis* demo shows the basic ideas behind the distributed network approach of the *Netz* APQ

Havok runs amok

Physics simulation code in the middle of a licensing frenzy

Havok business development officer Alan Murphy

havok

So far we've licensed *Havok* into 30 titles, but that was two days ago," **Alan Murphy**, Havok's business development officer, says on the Tuesday evening following the drawing to a close of ECTS. His client list is formidable, including the likes of Blizzard, Digital Anvil, Deep Red, Creature Labs and even Valve Software. "Yes, we are working with Valve," Murphy continues, his smile widening, "but we can't say on what."

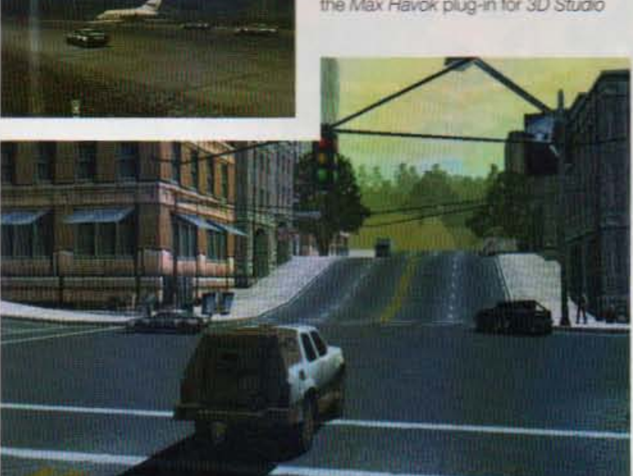
If any proof were still needed that middleware, and realtime physics middleware in particular, has a place in game development, the signature of Gabe Newell's boys on Havok's dotted line must be it. And yet it's been a year since the first beta code of *Havok* was released and only six months since it was unveiled at GDC2000.

It has only been a year since beta code of *Havok* was released, and a mere six months since the package was first aired in its entirety, but the team has already grown from eight to 35

"This time last year we were eight staff, now we're 35," Murphy explains. "We've had to beef up the development team to deal with multi-platform support, which is one of the key selling points for why anyone would buy an out-sourced engine."

Another pointer to the explosive growth of the Dublin-based company has been its amicable purchase of German physics specialist Ipion. "They had a very good rigid body dynamic model, we had a much broader feature set, network support and also we had the artist tools," says Murphy. Indeed the *Max Havok* plug-in for *3D Studio Max* has been highlighted thanks to Blizzard's use of it in the introductory movies for *WarCraft III*, as well as the increasing demand for rapid prototyping design tools that can be used without programming experience. Although Havok and Ipion continue to offer separate products at present, the company is now working on a combined API, called *Havana*.

"We intend to offer a very strong integrated solution for both soft and rigid bodies with a strong level of technical depth," says Murphy. Another of *Havana*'s key design criterion is its ability to handle interoperability across the full range of both internal and middleware engines. "A significant part of the installed base is NDL's *NetImmerse* engine for PC and PS2 but whether developers are using an external or an internal engine the same issues arise," he says, explaining that *Havok* ships with plenty of source code, so developers can tweak it as they wish. "Each application is specific, and because of that we don't claim to hold the high ground," Murphy stresses. "We provide the level of support developers require. That's very important to us." Given the amount of interest being shown, there could be a lot more vacancies looming at Havok for onsite support engineers. Irish eyes are still smiling.



Digital Anvil's *Loose Cannon* will be one an ever-growing number of titles that will utilise Havok's realtime physics middleware in its development process

URL
www.havok.com

Going in Headfirst

One game that makes full use of the opportunities provided by Havok's realistic dynamics is Headfirst's *Call of Cthulu*. Based on the HP Lovecraft book, a key part of this horror firstperson shooter is the way the player interacts with the physical environment. You will be able drag bodies around, hide them and even feed them to the monsters that inhabit the world. Another part of the game involves you jumping across a row of hanging gantries, which swing wildly as you land on them. Digital Anvil's vehicle combat title *Loose Cannon* and Deep Red's 'Thunderbirds'-based game are other experiences that rely on *Havok* to provide players with a more realistic style of gameplay.

***Call of Cthulu* relies on Havok to help realise key elements of interaction with the game environment**

Fair play Terraplay

Swedish-developed server system levels out lag times

Terraplay CEO Bengt Lilliequist

One of the first games to test Terraplay's technology was Digital Illusions' title *Swedish Touring Car Championship*

Conceived within Ericsson's research laboratories, and now a separate company part-funded by the Swedish handset giant, Terraplay Systems launched its network API and IP-based game platform at ECTS.

Designed to create a level playing field for online gamers with different connection speeds and modem types, Terraplay relies on a system that intelligently prioritises the game data its server sends to players to ensure the lowest possible lag. "Terraplay makes bandwidth use more effective, which is important for the many players who use ordinary modems and for those who will continue to do so," says CEO **Bengt Lilliequist**. "Effective use of bandwidth is also key for wireless communication."

Terraplay's API supports all kinds of online games, from peer-to-peer games, such as *Age of Empires*, to client-server games such as firstperson shooters. Testing has already begun with a version of *Quake*, and Digital Illusions has retrofitted the high-level network code into its *Swedish Touring Car Championship* (*STCC*) game. "We reduced the bandwidth for *STCC*'s dedicated server considerably with Terraplay," says Digital Illusions' **Vidar Nygren**. "It was also possible to support a lot of spectators during races over the Internet."

Available free as an SDK to those who sign up for the development programme, the Common Networking Interface (CNI) allows developers to create networked content that can be accessed by a wide range of devices, including mobile phones. "With Terraplay, game developers can create the networking engine for online multiplayer games more quickly, and the result is better games in more sophisticated environments," says Lilliequist. Nygren reckons it took two to four man weeks to implement the code. "It's relatively easy to use and is a very quick system to start working with, but it can take a while before you can use it in the most efficient way," he warns.

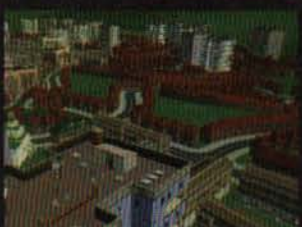
At the heart of the system is Terraplay's server technology. The cross-platform, modular design allows for a more flexible solution. There are two basic components: Games Access Server (GAS) for client-server games and Terraplay Application Network Concept (GAS-TANC) for peer-to-peer. In the case of the latter, one of the client machines fulfils the role of a GAS. Various communication methods such as a dynamic subscription model and adaptive rate control can then be employed, depending on the number of game objects and players involved. Currently in talks with ISPs, Terraplay expect its GASs to be

URL
www.terraplay.com

Diary of a videogame

Pressure grows as Elixir readies *Republic: The Revolution* for market

Elixir diary, part 23
by designer Joe McDonaugh



As *Republic: The Revolution* moves towards its final phase of development Elixir has expanded, recruiting designer Tuomas Pirinen (top) and green-locked animator Werner Van Jaarsveld (above)

Elixir has expanded rapidly over the last two months and we've gone from 22 people to 30. It's the classic developer dilemma: you start with a small, tightknit team and then find there's too much work for them and you need more bodies. The problem is that it's very hard to find people with the right talent and the right attitude. There are a lot of talented people out there but a lot of them won't fit in, or aren't really up for it. Do you: a) recruit people and hope they'll fit in and do the job, or b) hold on for the right people, meanwhile asking others cover the shortfall?

Our greatest need was to find quality animators. The industry is split between people who use animators and those who use motion capturing. Initially we went for motion capturing, but were dissatisfied with the results. Given that *Republic: The Revolution* is about people, they have to be as convincing and realistic as possible, so we decided to bring animators in. Good animators, though, are rarer than gold. Colin, our head of art, reckons that good animators are born rather than made in that it's an instinctive skill rather than one you can teach. Look at the recruitment pages at the back of **Edge** and you can see how much in demand they are, a situation exacerbated by the fact that they are also highly sought after in the film industry, too. We've been tremendously lucky in finding and recruiting not just one, but two animators in the last two months. Matthew Everitt joins the company as senior animator, with Werner Van Jaarsveld working alongside him as animator. Werner lost no time in dying his hair green, concerned perhaps by his apparent normality in an office full of oddballs. It might also have been an attempt look less conspicuously normal amongst Camden's hordes of blue-haired, multi-pierced German and Spanish teenagers.

We've also been extremely lucky to have Tuomas Pirinen join as lead designer on our second game, who has a fantastic pedigree in game design. For the past five years he's been at Games Workshop, where he eventually became head of games development. The last project he did for them was to lead the sixth edition of the legendary tabletop fantasy wargame *Warhammer*. Previously an anti-tank sergeant in the Finnish army and a black belt in kung fu, Tuomas also carries a nunchaku around with him in his work bag. He also tells me that back home in Finland games are extremely popular amongst women, and that he used to get mobbed at games conventions. Plans to set up Elixir's Finnish office are well underway as I write.

Republic: The Revolution has moved into a new phase of production, arguably the toughest one of all, which is the one that ends with the game on the shelves. It's a time for hard-nosed pragmatism and painful decisions. If designers had their way, no game would ever hit the shelves. There's always more you can do and you're never satisfied with it. That's why you need a very sharp knife with which to cut out everything that isn't essential to the game, which, as you can imagine, is a source of much contention. We've had a lot of very tense meetings, some of which have become shouting matches. You might think it odd that we scream at each other over whether to have hills in the game or not, but we do, and it's healthy – it proves that people are deeply committed to making this game a success. As ever, the subjectivity of game design makes these decisions hard to make.

'It's the classic developer dilemma: you start with a small, tightknit team, and then find there's too much work for them and you need more bodies'

As part of this process I've undertaken a revision of the *Republic: The Revolution* game-design bible, which currently stands at about 30,000 words. It's a huge undertaking and one that requires patience and mind-boggling attention to detail. Despite the glamorous perception of the designer's role, much of his work requires a keen eye for detail and thoroughness. An example of this is the need to use consistent terminology. For example, if you have a commodity in the game which you are calling 'influence', you can't start calling it 'power'. This sounds self-evident, but it's a common mistake that leads to a lot of confusion. You also need give frequent, clear and idiot-proof examples. You need to check that there are no contradictions or inconsistencies across the breadth of a 100-page design document, which is no easy task. As ever, you're striving for simplicity and elegance – to make a complicated game is the easiest thing in the world, as it's very easy to be over-elaborate. Pace is a key factor in deciding whether a game is fun, and over-elaboration slows gameplay down.

Online gaming is the rage in our office at the moment and a number of people are committed *Diablo II* nuts. Most impressive of all is the dedication that Chris, our systems administrator, has for *Ultima Online*. Eschewing the tedium of heroes, dragons, wizards and fabulous artifacts, Chris has decided instead to be a fisherman. He managed to rack up an impressive 15 hours online over the weekend – fishing. He's even hotkeyed in 'fish steaks for sale' just in case the action proves too much as a solitary adventurer ambles past his furious fishing and a selling opportunity disappears in the blink of an eye. I've tried to put a positive spin on this by making encouraging noises about his 'commitment', although my animated giggling fits may have led him to question the sincerity of these remarks. You've got to feel sorry for him – I mean, he spends his days dreaming of the day when he can break free from the chains of videogame development to emerge as the beautiful mackerel fisherman he's always wanted be. It must be hell.

The Codeshop diary now focuses on two projects from two developers. Elixir's next instalment will be in E92

The making of...

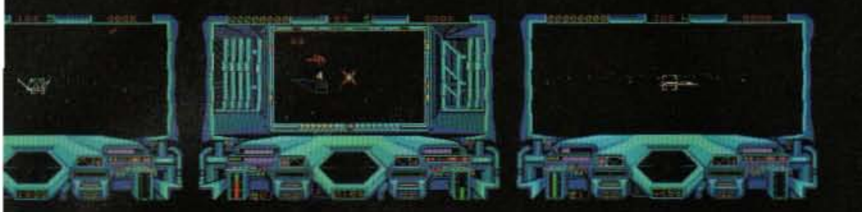
StarGlider

Aged 19, Jez San taught the Atari ST to sing while coding the ambitious *StarGlider*. The title's subsequent success shot him into *The Times* rich list and established Argonaut as a bona fide industry player. He tells **Edge** about the early years

StarGlider was – quite literally – a game that sang. When developer Argonaut released versions for the Amiga and ST in 1986, it astounded the world by producing super-crisp song lyrics (albeit among a composition of slightly questionable worth). This ensured that the game was run on every demonstration machine in Dixons, and generated enough cash and interest to launch the company now responsible for *Alien Resurrection* into the industry's premier league.

Jez San was just 19 when he started coding the game, and explains how *StarGlider* actually came out of a failed bid to gain the rights to 'Star Wars': "I was talking with their lawyers, but negotiations didn't work out so I deviated from my plan. I created an original 3D game that had storyline, animation, sound samples and many other firsts for a 16bit game – even though nothing gives you a rush as much as 'using the force' on that original 'Star Wars' coin-op did for one million bonus points."

Anyone entering the game world for the first time would recognise the vector style reminiscent of some of San's favourite games – including *Battlezone*, *Elite* and *Star Wars* – which he quotes as inspirations. Nevertheless, *StarGlider* developed its own distinctive game universe, which was bonded together by a tremendous narrative



Finding and skimming over those vital fuel lines was necessary at key moments of *StarGlider*. As the game progressed, however, the Egrons would begin to defend the towers with heavy tanks and walkers

The game was run on every demonstration machine in Dixons, and generated enough cash and interest to launch Argonaut into the industry's premier league

line. "I originally had [the player] shooting the tops off towers, just like the *Star Wars* coin-op," explains San, "but when I didn't get the rights I made my game more story-led, more free-roaming, and ultimately a deeper game than the one I originally wanted to do."

An impressive feature was the game's attention to detail – it came beautifully packaged with a flight manual, a novella, a functional key guide, and a poster of your AGAV vehicle. The story was based on Novenia, a dying planet ravaged by nuclear fallout and the invasion of the evil Egron empire. The novella was a welcome touch, which managed to establish the game world incredibly well before play. "My agent, Jacqui Lyons, was also a literary agent," says San. "She represented a very good novelist called James Follett (the brother of Ken Follett), and he penned the novel and helped with the characters. But most of the storyline was inspired by the game."

Interestingly, the vector style of *StarGlider* was explained in the novella by the post-apocalyptic state of the planet. Plausible reasons were given for why the planet was dark and how your hero could see through structures and enemies.

Simply flying around the *StarGlider* world proved a worthwhile experience in itself, and whenever an enemy installation or walker was encountered the temptation to shoot it until it disintegrated into a cloud of pixels was overwhelming. However, subtler techniques needed to be employed to stay alive in the long run. Enemy strategies developed at a fast rate, and as the levels went up their numbers and cunning would increase. Gung-ho blasting would be rejected in favour of a more tactical approach. Chief among these were managing to recharge your energy shields by carefully following the power lines while avoiding the deadly missile launchers.

The main objective of the game – to take out StarGlider 1 – could be incredibly tricky. Once it appeared, a missile would have to be collected from one of your silos. The mothership would then have to be tracked at the perfect speed before you launched your precious rocket. Once fired, your cockpit view would alter to show the camera directly behind the missile (an unusual technique at the time). It would then have to be directed to StarGlider's weakest spot – its underbelly – to damage the hull. Three direct hits were required.

One of San's proudest moments during the game's development was discovering a way to make the ST's sound chip sing: "The sound chip had no analogue output and certainly no waveform. I opened up the Atari and put a voltmeter across the outputs of the sound chip, and by playing with the volume control of the three sound channels and measuring the voltages of how they interact I built up a lookup table that allowed me to play waveforms on hardware that was in theory not capable of doing it. Hence people were astounded by the lyrics to the *StarGlider* song that you hear when the game boots up. It sounds simple now, but back then this was a major technical achievement."

San had never done anything on the scale of *StarGlider*. It was a bold game to attempt, but, as with all classic games, its elements came together to deliver a sublime challenge

Although San had experience optimising assembler code and had programmed a few titles, such as *Skyline Attack* on the Commodore 64, there had been nothing quite on the scale of *StarGlider*. It was a bold game to attempt, but, as with all classic games, its elements came together to deliver a sublime challenge. But even San required help towards the end, and describes the process of bug finding '80s-style: "My friend Gary Sheinwald was my producer at Rainbird. During the last few days of the games development we took shifts. I stayed up all day and night fixing bugs while he slept next door. When I'd fixed them I'd wake him up, and then I'd go to sleep while he tested the game to look for more bugs. We alternated like this for several days, but it was very effective and got the game out.

"Part of me prefers the old days," he continues. "When you could program in assembler and make machines do things no one even dreamed of. That was what drove me back then – not the money, but the achievement of writing fast code that did something cool and new." Indeed, San's name appeared in the annual *The Times* Rich List (he occupied 198th place with a £150 million fortune), and he is a constant reminder of just how the industry has changed and how far the bedroom coders of the '80s have come. "[Back then] the business and finance community pooh-poohed games companies," San recalls. "It's a little different now. Back in the 'ol' days' we used to get a few thousand pounds as an advance. It was the royalties that did the big numbers. I lived quite lean for a couple of years off that advance while finishing *StarGlider*. Luckily, I still lived with my parents, so expenses were minimal (cinema and pizzas were my outgoings). But when the game came out it flew of the shelves and made a fortune for a young kid like me, and gave me the start I needed."

But does the *StarGlider* legacy haunt San? "No, I'm never sick of hearing about it. Argonaut is now a thriving game developer with nearly 150 people. It helped put us on the map – and got me my first big cheques. The royalties from *StarGlider* allowed us to expand to six people and then to ten. Then we wrote *StarGlider 2*, *Birds of Prey*, and a number of other titles."

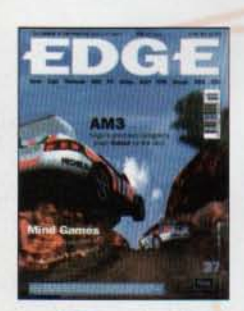
The passion to produce cutting-edge software and push hardware to its limits is still very much a part of the Argonaut philosophy. You merely need to experience the intensity of the company's latest title, *Alien Resurrection*, for confirmation of this. But San is also looking to harness technology in new ways. "These are interesting times. A couple of years ago we spun off a hardware division and made it into a separate company, and this has gone from strength to strength. It will go public at the end of September and is called ARC. It designs a fantastic new type of RISC microprocessor that's customisable and configurable by its users. It may well change the world of electronic product design. And to think it all started at Argonaut." Built thanks, of course, to those early *StarGlider* cheques.

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 27, December 1995

If Sony's ad in last month's **Edge**, replete with peel-off CD, kicked up an amount of controversy (you wouldn't believe how many angry emails blasted into the office from readers unhappy with getting something for nothing), then the effort on p40 of **E**27 was akin to a nuclear disaster to the mag's more sensitive fans – especially those with allergic reactions to feathers, which 3DO ingeniously paid to have pasted on to the page.

Unconventional marketing initiatives aside, issue 27 reported on the PlayStation's Euro rollout, with 20,000 units sold on its launch weekend. While this was some result at the time, it rather pales against today's demand for the preposterously popular console's successor.

Elsewhere the magazine was filled with the elements that typified the era: a preview of a mediocre 3DO title, arcade shots from *Soul Edge*, Sega's latest images from its latest ambitious Saturn coin-op conversion (*Virtua Fighter 2*, in this instance), plus reviews which including one of the first UK-produced PS offerings (*Loaded*).

Clearly this was a period of transition, and it's not difficult to draw a parallel with today's landscape. But isn't quality so much easier to identify today?

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

Digital Pictures' **Tom Zito**: "I personally could never really care enough about Princess Zelda to spend 40 hours battling through the forest in order to rescue her." Zito no longer has a games company.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

Responding to a reader query which asked whether Sony and Sega would be releasing further new machines beyond PlayStation and Saturn in order to combat 3DO's M2 upgrade: 'Of course, although it's unlikely you'll see them arrive in Japan until at least 1997/8'.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Loaded (PS; 8/10), *Blade Force* (3DO; 7/10), *Wing Arms* (Saturn; 5/10), *Screamer* (PC; 7/10), *J-League Prime Goal EX* (PS; 7/10), *V Tennis* (Saturn; 7/10), *Boxer's Road* (Saturn; 5/10)

1

2

1. Tom Zito, Mr Interactive Movie himself 2. The 33rd JAMMA show saw a coin-op industry in relatively rude health 3. **Edge**'s peek into the world of AI 4. 3DO tells readers to buy a 3DO, not a dodo, with a rather memorable ad campaign 5. Yes, *of course* M2 graphics were going to look like this 6. *Star Fighter*, the cutting edge of 32bit 3DO gaming back in 1995

3

yaDodo

4

5

6

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Codemasters' **Jon Hare** counts ten

Wizball is just one of the highlights from Hare's varied career

I'll give you the top ten moments in my gaming life:

1. Receiving the InDin award for Developer of the Year for the second year in a row in 1993.

2. Holding the inaugural Sensible Soccer World Cup in our office at March in 1992. Twenty-four people competed, mostly journos, with fish, chips and lager at halftime. All the closing matches were played on a big screen. The tournament was eventually won by Phil King and he even shed a tear as he received the trophy.

3. March 1985, Chris (Yates) and I return from our trip to Ocean in Manchester with a £1,000 cheque after just signing up *Parallax* on C64, our first ever game as Sensible Software. We had a cigar each on the train home to celebrate.

4. The whole experience of making *Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Roll* – it was a creative dream from start to finish.

5. Receiving a postcard of Ally McCoist from a Scottish fan. On the back it said in big letters: '*Sensible Soccer* – fucking magic'.

6. Shooting the *Cannon Fodder* video in a field in Suffolk – the whole thing only cost £200 to make. Those were the days.

7. C64 *Wizball* receiving the Game of the Decade ('80s) award from *Zzap 64!* magazine.

8. Every match we ever played as Sensible FC either as five-a-side or as 11-a-side. We were shit but I loved every minute of it.

9. The day I worked out that I really was worth more than £1m.

10. Finally selling Sensible to Codemasters and realising that after 13 years, the last two of which had been living hell, Chris and I had managed to emerge unscathed and in one piece, without ever having had a single argument and always completely trusting each other.

FAQ

Dave Perry

President, Shiny Entertainment Inc

If ever development spawned a playboy, tall and tanned **Dave Perry** is it. Residing in sun-bleached Laguna Beach, about 50 miles south of LA, he sports the classic symbols of the made-it gamer: big car, big house, big toys. Shiny's latest creation, *Sacrifice*, is released on PC later this year.

What was the first videogame you played?
It was probably *Pong* – I didn't even own one, I had to go play it on a friend's machine. Well, actually he wasn't much of a friend, so I had to put up with him to hog time on his machine.

What was the first computer you owned?
The first one was the good old 1K Sinclair ZX81. Sometime around then I also got a brilliant Casio programmable calculator that had BASIC on it, so I could program at home and at school when I was supposed to be studying.

What was the first thing you ever created on a computer?
It was a program in BASIC on the ZX81. It went something like:

```
10 INPUT "What is your name?",A$
20 PRINT "Hello ";A$
```

How much joy I had with that. Typing in my name over and over, typing in other people's names and trying to fool it. Luckily, I kept going and my programs became a little more useful.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
My first 'real' 9-to-5 job was working for Mikro-Gen in Ashford. I was asked to convert a Spectrum game called *Pyjamarama* to the Amstrad CPC. I did it and my first review was 10/10. I was hooked by that point.

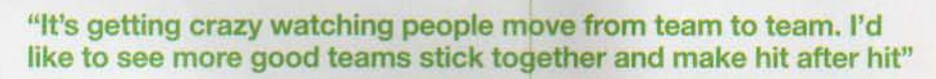
What's your favourite game ever, and why?
I am totally fickle. I change my mind all the time. I always want the 'next' thing. But I enjoyed the old games like *Jetpac*, *Manic Miner*, *Deathchase* – and the classic ones like *GoldenEye*, *C&C* and *Diablo*. I just keep looking to the future.

What was the last game you played?
I have been playing *SWAT 3* on the PC. I loved the ambience. However, the AI needs some work as you keep bumping into your team – not a clever thing to do in real life.

How many hours a week do you play games?
I would like to spend about 20; I get about five.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
I love the Namco *Alpine Racer* skiing games and *Silent Scope*. I am also a sucker for pinball machines. I think they've got some great gameplay elements which we can learn from for videogames. Like games, they run from a programmable ROM. So, let's just say I have some very custom games, including a great *Terminator 2* machine where Arnie screams 'Fuck you, asshole!' at me.

What's your favourite movie, book and album and of all time?
My favourite movie is a tie between 'Aliens' and 'The Matrix'. I think James Cameron is a genius. I am also amazed how the Wachowski brothers can have such a clear shared vision. Book? Right now I'm enjoying the Harry Potter series. The authoress JK Rowling has so many neat ideas on how to keep children entertained, but also keeping a story interesting for adults.



Another good writer for books in that style is Roald Dahl. For more traditional books I like Michael Crichton because of his concentration on technology as a base for his stories.

Which game would you most like to have worked on?
Probably *GoldenEye* – the game freakin' rocked. I met the team before it was released. I hope to see them again so I can shake their hands.

Of all the games you've been involved with in the past, which is your favourite, and why?
Earthworm Jim on Genesis was a fantastic experience. I borrowed millions of dollars to set up Shiny. Luckily for me, the game and all the licensing was well received worldwide and I paid the money back – that's rare in this business.

What are you working on at the moment?
I am trying to get our latest game, *Sacrifice*, complete, and then clear my administration workload so I can focus on designing our first PlayStation2 title.

What stage is the project at?
Early pre-design, now gently moving into final

design. I have not been this personally involved with a title since *Earthworm Jim*.

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
I would like to see real emotion manipulation more often. So, for example, I 'know' when you are worried, when you are feeling clever, when you are tired, when you are lost. I can 'detect' this using many different tricks. I should use this to heighten your experience, yet 99.9 per cent of games don't. I hope that changes.

What annoys you about the industry?
That there is too much movement of talent around. People get ants in their pants after about one game now. It's getting crazy watching people move from team to team. I'd like to see more good teams stick together and just make hit after hit after hit. That's how you make money in this business.

What is the most expensive item that you have ever bought with a bonus?
A large house by the ocean which I never see because I'm always working.

Whose work do you most admire?
Definitely Peter Molyneux. He reminds me to think big, to keep believing that it's better to innovate than to replicate. He has one of the best track records in our business.

Finally, synthesis or persistence?
Why is it you guys always end up asking questions about picking up girls?

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

Having no discernible affiliations, other than to myself, I just wanted to express my dismay at the sheer poverty of ideas and technological finesse on 'display' at Sony's PS2 stand at ECTS. Yes, it's early doors; yes, it's first-gen software; yes, it's a beast to program for, but by God we should expect more. Shouldn't we?

The difference between the PS1 and PS2 rooms? Bilinear filtering. That's it. That's all. Yes, I know, the PS2 can toss around a shitload of polys. But who cares when the display quality is so benightedly awful? Fuzzy, grainy, and just plain *raw*. *GT2000* must be nearly two years into development and still looks merely passable.

Call me a cheap sensationalist but I find graphical beauty... well, beautiful. It's not going to salvage a cruddy game, but it's sure as hell going to enrichen a good one. The PS2 looks thoroughly incapable in this regard. Perhaps you guys saw some stuff behind closed doors that augured better for the future. I hope so, because right now the Dreamcast is looking a much better balanced machine – which is no good to me or anyone else since Sega's baby is clearly being slowly but firmly suffocated by (understandably) callous publishers.

The PS2 will be the first console *ever* that I won't buy at launch. November 24 will be a sad day indeed for this game fan.

Jake, via email

And another opinion...

I think the reason many people are disappointed with the capabilities of PS2 is not because the machine itself is underpowered but that the promises made by Sony were so extravagant. They set the bar way too high with their prerelease publicity and the PS2 couldn't possibly live up to the expectations that people had. But the PS2 is still a good machine. The reality is that the PS2 is in the same league as the DC – a little better in some areas, a little worse in others. And what's wrong with that? People wouldn't feel so disgruntled if Sony hadn't exaggerated the PS2's abilities to such an outrageous degree. It's time to come back to Earth and appreciate PS2 for what it is: a terrific console that will provide good-looking games – at least until X-Box and GameCube come along.

George Miralles, via email

But wait – it's not Sony's fault, but **Edge**'s...

The hype and spin-doctoring surrounding the release of the PlayStation2 has reached such ludicrous proportions that I just had to write in. The myths that have been propagated by Sony and the affiliated press regarding the PS2's performance have by and large been accepted as truth by the buying public. It is an astonishing achievement when a console manufacturer can convince a huge number of people that their product is revolutionary in spite of clear evidence to the contrary! The frenzy that has been drummed up by the press amounts to a case of the Emperor's New Clothes. I, like most people I've talked to, find it difficult to distinguish between screenshots taken from PS1 and PS2. In this, **Edge** as much as any other magazine, must share some of the blame. By accepting the exaggerated claims of the manufacturer, without first examining the evidence, I'm afraid **Edge** has contributed to what can only be called one of the most astonishing campaigns of propaganda in recent memory. To **Edge**'s credit, you now seem to have recognised that PS2 is somewhat less than its PR makes it. Perhaps this will be a lesson well learned and you will be far more wary with regard to the X-Box and Dolphin publicity campaigns.

Robert Quinn, via email

A crucial consideration here is what materials videogame manufacturers make available to the press upon initial unveilings. Sony once used prerendered footage that ended up in the dismal movie 'Hackers' to demonstrate the supposed power of the original PlayStation, for heaven's sake. Sega, conversely, used elements such as its 'Tower Of Babel' demo to show what DC could do – and the finished unit could. Does the finished *Tekken Tag Tournament* look like the originally mooted demos? Draw your own conclusions.

From the X-Box article (**E**88): "There is a concern about direct ports... [the publishers] say that that's death for a franchise... If a company is going to produce their racing game for PC and X-Box... But their competitors target the X-Box, then the competition will look better, play better, and damage their franchise – giving their competitors an advantage." Apparently that didn't seem to have stopped the truckload of developers releasing direct ports of their PC titles to the Dreamcast resulting in an overall disappointing catalogue of AAA titles (releasing a console with no AAA RPG is financial suicide in Japan). After all, Dreamcast was easy to program for and still has ample power left for developers to work with for quite a few years. How is Microsoft planning to avoid the unavoidable PC ports and arcade ports?

Anon, via email

As has been said on these pages before, fortunately a gamer is in charge (see p26).

In reply to Amanda McPherson's letter (**E**88), I

PlayStation2 finds varied opinions among Edge readers. It's overhyped, says Robert Quinn, while George Miralles says that it should be given time

think it is unfair to compare the possible effects on human behaviour of reading women's magazines and playing videogames. As far as I am aware there is as yet little conclusive evidence that the constant portrayal of super-waif models in the media contributes to definite adverse outcomes such as anorexia, although I concede that it is plausible and possible. It is probably easier to prove that such images influence attitudes which may in turn influence behaviour, but once you have a chain of effect, direct proof of a final outcome becomes more difficult.

It is probably a lot easier to subtly influence changes in behaviour where the changes are rather innocuous (in the short term), like dieting or excessive exercising, compared to what games are often accused of, ie violent actions. Most people have enough moral sense to realise this is wrong. Those who don't have such in-built moral restrictions over their activities probably would do what they do regardless, and although it could be argued that 'violent' videogames could act as a trigger, so equally could most action films, videos, news stories, or the latest heavy metal record.

However, Ms McPherson does raise an important issue. The very young – say, under-10s (who probably only make up a small proportion of the gameplaying demographic) – are more likely than the typical PlayStation 20-30-somethings to have yet to develop necessary moral concepts of right and wrong (see the James Bulger case, for example), and as such may be more susceptible to influence by certain media, including (but not exclusively) videogames. Most games up to now are clearly fantasy. They are set in science fiction or orc and troll worlds with incredible characters and over-the-top weapons. This helps even impressionable individuals to realise it is 'just a game'. However, with the next-gen consoles, including the recently revealed Nintendo GameCube, the technology is there to produce more lifelike games. This trend has already been seen in a lot of PC firstperson shooters where the hero is not a space hero but a soldier, commando, SWAT team member, or lifelike criminal acting out scenarios where killing scores of other lifelike humans is part and parcel of winning, and all played out in an increasingly photorealistic setting.

Generally I am against censorship, but I think with the trends I note above, it can only become more important in the videogame world, both to assuage fears, and also possibly to prevent future problems. However, like all censorship, it cannot work by itself; it is a collaborative effort between developers, publishers, retailers, parents, and, yes, journalists too (no game mags are restricted to certain ages, yet some certainly could be more circumspect in the glorification of the violence in certain games), and sadly, because of this, is probably doomed to fail.

Dr Alan Choo-Kang, via email

I am writing to you from Hungary, on behalf of my husband, Attila Héger – he is a game soundtrack composer. I have found this citation on Tim Follin's Web site: 'Tim Follin's musical score is inspired, displaying a sensitivity to the title's demeanour too often lost on Western videogame musicians.' – **Edge** magazine, June 2000, p80.

If it is from your **Edge** magazine, then I am a little bit disappointed.

If you see the booklet of the *Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future*, you can see that Tim Follin wrote only the in-game music, and my husband, Attila Héger, was the composer for all cinematics soundtracks in this game. By the way, Attila composed also the most tracks of the *Ecco 2: Tides of Time* for the Mega Drive.

In Hungary there is a saying: 'You have to see both sides of every coin...' I hope you understand what I mean. If one of the composers gets any reaction, light, review or anything else, it has to be given to the other as well, or am I wrong?

If you're interested in Attila's work, you can visit www.larendor.homestead.com. Thank you for your patience.

Kriszta Heger, via email

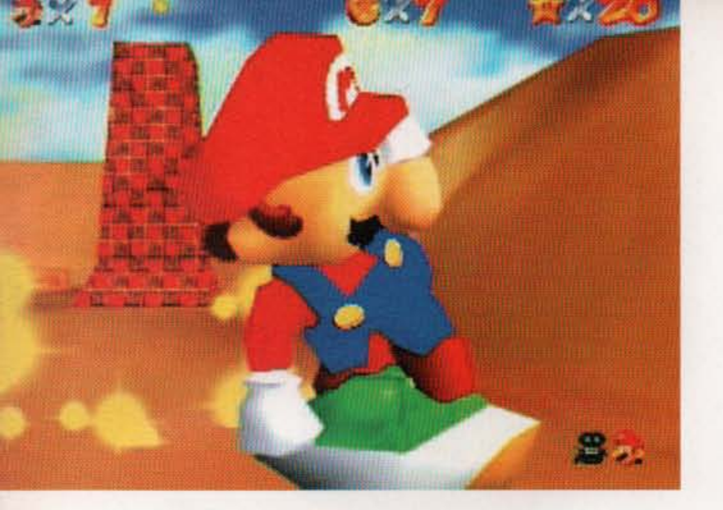
During review – without a finished manual – **Edge** was not aware of this, and duly apologises.

What's happened to Nintendo's promised 'adult' themes? Don't get me wrong – I was impressed by Nintendo's GameCube software demonstrations at Spaceworld, but *Mario* et al still look as if they were directed towards a child audience – which is not a bad thing (heaven forbid, I would not want Nintendo to jeopardise this side of there market), but come on, Nintendo, I am 23 years old and it's gonna take a lot more than a 'Hey, it's-a me, Mario!' welcoming screen to attract me to Nintendo this time around.

Also, how about the design of the console and controller? I personally believe that the N64 looked more adult orientated in its black guise (hopefully you will be able to have other case colours for GameCube). The controller also looks childish with its big yellow button. Yes, I suppose it will be ergonomically correct and easy to use, but it is not as sombre, mature or as cool as Sony's offering.

Despite this, however, I might be tempted to buy a GameCube when it is released in the UK because

'What happened to Nintendo's promised 'adult' themes? Don't get me wrong, but *Mario* et al still look as if they're directed at a child audience'



Ashutosh Chhibbar cites *Super Mario 64* as a game which does not make use of unconventional techniques to work

I love Nintendo games. I am worried, though, that because of the above, Nintendo will not be the massmarket next-generation leader. I am convinced that Sony's adult-themed, club-orientated marketing approach and stylistic console will beat Nintendo's offering in this upcoming console war. The reason why? We are the ones with money to spend, not eight-year-olds! I'm waiting, Nintendo – impress me.
Gavin Hodgson, via email
It would appear that Nintendo has given up on capturing everyone. But if, as you say, you love Nintendo games, where's the problem?

Nice marketing ploy there by Sony – placing their free CD on the adjacent page to your investigation into Sega with the strongest glue the **Edge** editorial team have left over after putting together another edition [**E**89]. So strong, in fact, that when you carefully remove the CD, half of the Sega logo is ripped up. Nice one, guys.

Now Johnny has his first tarnished edition of **Edge**... out of 40.

Never mind, Johnny still loves you.
John Stevens, via email

The technical specs and the vitriolic chest beating of its creators make the X-Box seem like an exciting proposition, but I am not convinced. **Edge** was right to question the role of Japanese developers in its software line-up – how many times have we seen technically competent machines (3DO, Atari Lynx, Sega Saturn) die a death due to insufficient firstparty titles and mediocre thirdparty support? Surely the PlayStation would not have achieved half of its success without the backing of the big Japanese softcos (Konami, Namco, Square, Capcom et al). I think the X-Box's western heritage will count against it in the long run. More importantly, though, with the inevitable 'X-Box has encountered a fatal exception...', will there be enough space on the joypad for Ctrl, Alt, Del?
Martin Furnival, via email
A peripheral for this very purpose is in the works. (Note to Microsoft lawyers: this is a joke.)

Sony should be applauded for listening to developers and looking forward by producing a machine geared towards synthesis development. Though it now seems that these were developers in the minority, and that the PS2 should also have been made so it would be just as effective and easy to code using traditional methods.

Looking back at your greatest 100 games [**E**80], the top three were on the ageing N64. Those games had relatively small environments so that they could be packed with interaction, and that is what marked them out from the others. Will synthesis engines provide the same level of interaction, or will they only be able to display unlimited static scenery merely as eye candy for the gamer? The evidence seen so far certainly suggests the latter. With the GameCube, Nintendo has once again pushed the industry forward in the right direction – letting technology take a back seat due to the ease of game creation: it will allow developers brimming with ideas to implement them without having to waste time on devising coding tricks for aliasing problems or struggling to learn synthesis methods. Gameplay refinement can once again be top priority, allowing innovative companies new and old alike to shine. So while Sony continues to claim the PS2 will bring new levels of emotion into games, it will be Nintendo which will provide the medium so that a true renaissance may take place (X-Box not withstanding).
Ashutosh Chhibbar, via email

Er, correct me if I'm wrong here, but isn't the idea of a glossary-cum-dictionary to demystify and explain? Therefore, am I totally thick when I tell you that I thought the main flaw in your article 'The New Language Of Videogaming' was that it used jargon to explain jargon? I am a gaming geek to be sure, let's be clear about this, but the phrase 'the parametric surface function used in the course of NURBS rendering' isn't one I'd be inclined to consider as being part of even a hardcore gamer's vocabulary. Am I just stupid? Possibly, and much of the article was informative, but you did lapse into ultra-nerd land on a few occasions in there. Oh, and just to prove that I'm not totally thick, on p41 you say, '*Command & Conquer* clones have developed their own acronym'. Unfortunately 'RTS' is not an acronym. It is an abbreviation. Well, better end like a typical **Edge** reader, I suppose... *ahem*... so, what *is* the future for Sony/Sega/Nintendo?
Stu Peake, via email
RTS *is* an acronym, Stu. You need a new dictionary.

Correction

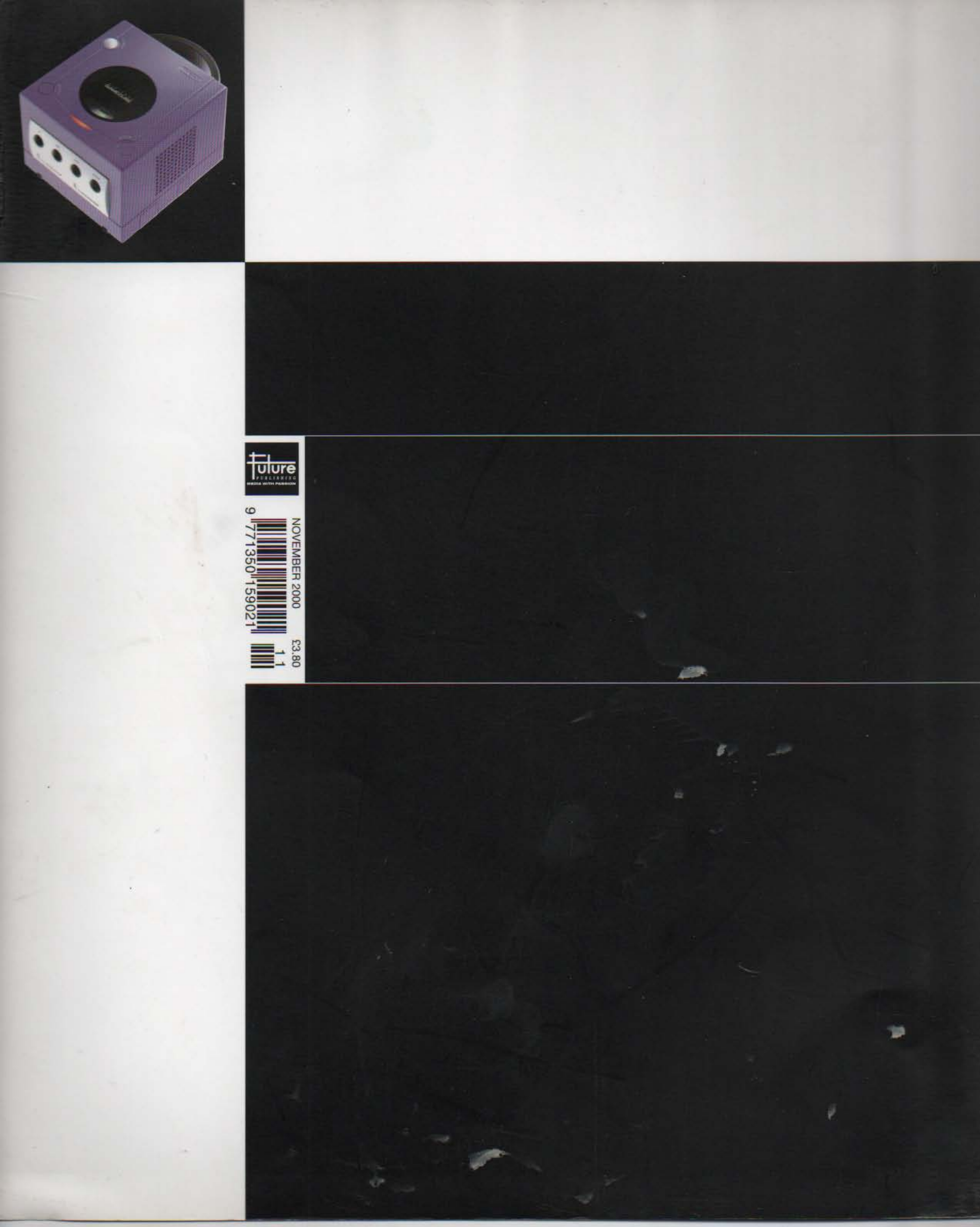
Last month's 'The Making Of...' contained an error in suggesting that Tony Takoushi once turned up at an event to sample *Lords of Midnight* in a state of inebriation. The passage of time has clearly fogged game author Mike Singleton's recollection, for industry veteran Takoushi is, and always has been, a teetotaller. Both **Edge**, and Mike Singleton personally, apologise sincerely for any embarrassment caused by this oversight.

> 'Looking back at your greatest 100 games, the top three were on the ageing N64. Those games had relatively small areas that could be packed with interaction'

Stu Peake found **E**88's 'The New Language O Videogames', which set out to clarify elemer somewhat unpalatable. Is he totally thick, he

It is one of the most revered titles in the history of videogaming. Sega tried to bring it home in the 32bit era, with limited success. Now, it is trying again on 128bit. Next month **Edge** talks to the the team charged with the Dreamcast conversion of *Daytona USA*.

UK edition November 2000 £1.80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